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# The dance of language

Robert M. Adams

WILLIAM H. RUECKERT

Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations  
266pp. University of California Press, £16.  
0520 03199 7

At the American Book Award ceremonies on April 30, 1981, Kenneth Burke received the National Medal for Literature – latest, perhaps last, and certainly most impressive of a long list of public recognitions. He was eighty-four years old at the time, and approaching, therefore, the end of a career which can be described both as fragmented between half a dozen different disciplines, and monomaniacal in its devotion to a single approach to a single topic. Between 1924 and 1968, Burke published eleven books; he has written dozens of articles and hundreds of reviews; he has given lectures and participated in conferences almost beyond number. Of recent years, he has become the focus of considerable academic attention, with several studies being devoted to the exposition of his thought, volumes in the making of which he has collaborated actively and critically. He is the most explanatory of writers, and his explanations never quite add up; he is ridden by a thesis which so far has never failed to question, subvert, and frustrate its own completion. Consequently, his reputation is extremely various. Because much of his prose is knotty and forbidding, he is altogether unknown to the larger Anglo-American readership; some philosophers and historians of literary criticism view him with total disdain as a middle-headed, undisciplined spinner of speculations; a small but growing cult regards him as one of the great figures of our age, a seminal thinker and a prophetic teacher. The great majority of those who know his work know it in bits and pieces,

scattered across a publication record of more than fifty years. To complicate matters further, though Burke has not published a new book for seventeen years now, it is a matter of public record that he has written a great many, if not all, of the components of one, designed to draw together many, if not all, of the strands of his tangled thought. He has drawn up several plans for such a book, partly congruent with one another, partly divergent; as they multiply, it seems increasingly doubtful that the climactic *Burkeaphia* will ever appear – especially since major elements of it have already been included in other collections. If it ever does appear, it is just as likely to undermine as to climax the structure already in place. Clearly, a short article about such a complicated figure will have to be highly selective, and, on many matters indispensable for comprehension, painfully rudimentary.

Fortunately, some handy short cuts are available. Though Burke's books appeared, over the years, under many different imprints, and were often out of print, the University of California Press (animated mainly by Robert Zachary) has lately made available most of the major volumes (*Attitudes Toward History* and *Permanence and Change*, the last two of the eleven, are promised for this autumn, with important Afterwords which Burke has thought it essential to subjoin). Further, a substantial survey of Burke's work by William Rueckert, titled *Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations*, originally published in 1963 by the University of Minnesota Press, has now been expanded, updated, and reissued, again by California. Professor Rueckert provides an excellent introduction to Burke, generally sympathetic, but occasionally critical, and providing (I think) more grounds for criticism than praise. The book is a gem, and the author of a series of "epistles or declamations" to which the word "novel" has been reservedly applied. For a while, he earned his living as a music critic; he has translated, mostly from the German; he has maintained with Marxism, Freudianism and Christianity bonds which are at once deep and ambiguous. These are simply some of the published aspects of Burke; among the unpublished manuscript materials, said to be

roughly, to the rest; and to the unpractised reader he offers excellent advice on where to start and how far to go. In making these judgments, Rueckert's occasional avoidances and abstinences are quite as significant as his explanations. He is an earnest, lucid, common-sense man who has devoted (by his own account) some twenty-five years to understanding the thought of Kenneth Burke. Where he falls silent before the complexities of an argument he would clearly love to explain, the reader, according to his temperament, will want either to plunge in or to cock an eyebrow.

In the most general and elementary of terms, then, Kenneth Burke is a critic of literature, of language, and of social relations. He has worked most of his life in and around academics, and written primarily for academic readers. Yet he never took even the basic AB degree, never followed the common academic track, never tried to take possession of a "field". (An admiring colleague once wrote that Burke's only real field was "Burkology": with characteristic dry wit, Burke made known, in a little poem, that that was one subject he had always flunked.) Though commonly characterized as a literary critic, because he first became known in that capacity, Burke has dealt in various ways and under various circumstances with aspects of linguistics, education, economics, technology, ecology, philosophy, sociology, politics, history, psychology and religion. He has been a poet, an aphorist, a writer of stories, and the author of a series of "epistles or declamations" to which the word "novel" has been reservedly applied. For a while, he earned his living as a music critic; he has translated, mostly from the German; he has maintained with Marxism, Freudianism and Christianity bonds which are at once deep and ambiguous. These are simply some of the published aspects of Burke; among the unpublished manuscript materials, said to be

voluminous, may be lurking still other aspects of the basic Burke. But it is unlikely that anything, either published or unpublished, will be found in the work of Burke which does not relate pretty closely to the theory of language which he first called "dramatistic" and then baptised "logological". Both these terms are Burkean coinages, and both point to the study of language, its inherent energies and structures, as the central area of his concern.

There are two ways to look at Burke's (or any other man's) literary criticism: in terms of the light it throws on specific works, as applied criticism; and as a self-contained body of doctrine, a system. There is room for overlap here; the difference is one of degree, not of kind, but with Burke it is important because, depending on the direction of his interests, he writes in two quite different ways. As a rule, the practical criticism is crisp, witty, piercing, and sometimes crude. Its predominant gift is for looking beneath formal structures and verbal patterns to expose the psychic patterns supplying them with energy – emphasizing, thus, analytic understanding at the expense of appearances and perhaps appreciation.

In this respect, Burke is a rather surprising romantic; he believes in the expressive function of poetry for the poet, and, through a variety of symbolic transfers, for the reader or audience as well. His work as critic is often to deconstruct the poem's carefully packaged compound of subliminal attitudes by making explicit, sometimes the "inner" attitudes sometimes their "outer" associational complexes. A joyous piece of serious mischief from Burke's first major collection of essays, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1941), is a rewriting, "in behalf of the play", of Mark Antony's famous speech over the body of Julius Caesar, from Shakespeare's drama. (The exercise was originally

intimated in Burke's first published book, *Counter-Statement*.) As he recites the famous lines ("Friends, Romans, countrymen," etc), Antony interpolates Burkean explanations of how the Roman audience in the play and the English audience in the theatre are being manipulated in their attitudes. "Your sympathies have been poisoned," Antony warns his audience. "Caesar a conqueror, a monarch by reason of his attainments? Yet he was deaf in one ear. He had the falling-sickness . . . Cassius was a better swimmer than Caesar. . . . And worst, for an emperor, on a night of storms and portents, he appeared on the stage in his nightgown – so let him die. For such reasons as these you are willing to put a knife through the ribs of Caesar." The preparation of a victim on whom significant psychic burdens can be off-loaded is the latent act here brought to light in a reversal of one of Burke's best aphorisms: "a poem is the dancing of an attitude". Here the attitude is reconstructed from the dance, which in the process becomes a sardonic Burkean, not an inimitable Shakespearean, performance.

A more radical aspect of Burke's critical analysis proceeds by looking into the associational clusters of text – seeking to discover, as Burke puts it, "what goes with what". In itself, this does not seem even particularly original. John Livingston Lowes for Coleridge (1927) and Carolyn Spurgeon for Shakespeare (1935) had worked to identify characteristic clusters of imagery as constituent elements of a poem's effect. Burke's interest in the motives underlying a text invited him to seek dominant values in ultimate terms, which though not actually present in the text could be sensed in disguised form behind it. Working from Freudian premises, Burke decreed that everything evil, ominous or threatening in a poem could be understood as a veiled expression of the "Demonic Trinity",

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the three excretory functions of faeces, urine, and semen. Though classic mechanisms such as repression and avoidance might obliterate direct references to these fundamental human functions, varieties of word-play such as puns, off-rhymes, assonances, and distant metaphors could imply them, and thus alert the vigilant critic.

This exercise Burke undertook to perform, with varying success. Nothing very surprising attended the demonstration that *Alice in Wonderland* was largely concerned with toilet training (a more extended Freudian translation of *Alice* by Phyllis Greenacre in 1955 left little to startle the knowing reader). But when Burke proposed to reinterpret Keats's Grecian Urn into Urine, and the vessel's final message to mankind as "Body is turd, turd body", he got as many shock waves as one might anticipate. That the poem expresses some contempt for the mere life of the body (as well as a shrinking from mere cold aestheticism) there's no question; what one does to a delicate structure of tonal values by reducing attitudes to their crudest ultimates is another matter. The brute reductive potential of Burke's practical criticism was and still remains a toad to be swallowed by those who find his larger theoretical formulations more than usually stimulating.

In fact, Burke has turned increasingly and deliberately away from literary criticism as the structures of dramatism and then logology have come to absorb his interests. Two exceptions are a considerable corpus of Shakespearean commentary and a pair of tributes to contemporary poets. Neither gives much opportunity for exercise of the critical system, such as it has become. His Shakespearean essays (on *Othello*, *Antony*, *Coriolanus*, and *Timon*, most notably) artfully combine rhetorical analysis with the assumption that the prime work of a tragedy is to manipulate guilt. The criticism is notably intensive; each play is treated as a self-contained unit but with a recurrent interest in the virtuous, virtuous hero: whose prototype Burke refers to in a poem as "Saint Theresias". The character-trait, more frequent in satiric spokesmen than in tragic heroes, strikes Burke to acute but not always wide-ranging reflection. His approach permits little reference to historic variables like those caught up in the catch-phrase "Jacobean melancholy", nor does he give any weight to the example of Jonson's sullen *Sejanus*, with its "Aesopian" use of imperial Rome to mask seventeenth-century discontents. To see the plays structurally, he sometimes seems ready to reduce them to skeletons. By no means does he give the impression we get from a less methodical man like Swinburne of being immersed in the literature for its own sake, and able to evoke, as from a keyboard, the full sonnetries of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Yet his special angle of vision yields special insights into the purgative functions of vituperation, and their interplay with the decking out of a satisfactory tragic sacrifice.

The two essays on modern poets Roethke and William Carlos Williams offer a convenient approach to Burke's intellectual "system" for the special reason that they are completely untouched by it. The first is a quite straightforward account of Roethke's imagery, the other an affectionate personal tribute to Doctor Williams. The second, on Williams, is more complex. It has seemed for some time almost a separate aspect of his personality. Very much like Coleridge, with whom in his early years he was fascinated, Burke can turn the metaphorical vein on or off as with a light-switch. This is the more peculiar as his central concern is not metaphysics proper, but the most intimate of themes, human individuality. Still, complications were inevitable. As human motives are conditioned externally by language as such, but also by institutions and institutions, facts and ideals - all of which are subject to multiple disguising, metaphorical substitutions, repressions, and sublimations - the system required from the first a prose and a structure of its own, both of which even devoted Burkeans often find opaque. And the theoretical ideas seem to have been developed in all but complete independence of critical particularities.

From time to time Burke calls on a literary text to illustrate a point or serve as a model for a demonstration; but he calls quite as readily on the social sciences, the philosophers or the theologians; and he works quite as cheerfully with popular novels of modest pretensions as with acknowledged "masterpieces".



Kenneth Burke photographed by Betty Rueckert, reproduced from *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke* edited by William H. Rueckert (University of Minnesota Press, 1969).

With or without a "system" at his disposal, Burke would be an ingenious, impish commentator on the human comedy; he has a bright, metallic mind, as exciting for its glints and flashes as for its solid constructs. But one doesn't get from Burke, as one does from Northrop Frye, for example, a sense that systematic study of major texts went into the making of the intellectual structure.

What, then, is the system? It is a theory of language and language-conditioned behaviour, built on a couple of very distinct attributes of human nature. Man for Burke is by definition a symbol-using animal, with an inherent and essential capacity for language. A direct consequence of possessing language and more than possessing it is an option, being committed to it as we are committed to eating, breathing, and standing on our hind legs) is man's command of a sphere otherwise unknown to nature, that is, the negative. Language and its special gift for the negative (as exemplified in the "thou shalt nots", in "no trespassing" signs, policemen, legal codes, and property restrictions) are at the root of all morality, all order, all social hierarchy. Consequently they are responsible for an essential, an inherent human guilt; and a properly comprehensive and incisive study of language - philology in the widest possible sense of the word - can be both diagnostic and therapeutic for the human condition. "Toward a Better Life" is not just the title of one of Burke's books. It is a leit-motif of much of his work.

The special, modern problem, as Burke sees it, is the predominance in life of technology with its limited vocabulary of scientism; thus man has become the servant of his own tools and the victim of a Cyclopean language, monocular in its focus on positivist facts. Given this basic definition of society and its discontents, "dramatism" is Burke's term for analysis and application of those myriad devices by which, in a society largely dominated by words and a literature largely composed of them, men manipulate their innate guilt. The resources available to us turn out to be practically limitless. We may express our guilt, transfer it to a scapegoat, sublimate it to an angel, make it in a human, seek forgiveness, or, more mortally, in an actual or symbolic suicide, or normalize it as part of a structure. All these are varieties of catharsis, since the only thing to be done with generative guilt is, so far as possible, to get rid of it. Hence the central importance of dramatic action as the most inclusive metaphor available to Burke for understanding and giving healthful direction to human motivation.

In another direction, analysing the dynamics of works of art enables Burke not only to see structures of affiliated energies; but to recognize a hierarchy of verbal powers, culminating for each particular poem, author, philosophic system, or highest "valency". The strategies used to approach these ultimate terms, which by dialectical paradox can be described only in negation, are so similar to those used to approach the godhead that Burke

can work out an extended analogy between a naturalist logology based on words and Christian theology based on the Word. This isn't just an ingenious play on "words", it is the basis for an ongoing mutual interrelationship by which the two disciplines modify and enrich one another, generating from their differences an ever-deeper sense

concerned like Burke with discovering "what goes with what", which values prevail in a particular work or author. But the agile and various dialectic of his system, animated by his own dogmatic scepticism, enables Burke to do this leap and peep work particularly well - to see structures behind surfaces, recognize functions behind fagades, and define the special operations of "difficult" tragic heroes like Timon and Coriolanus. Through his analyses of *Howards End* and *A Passage to India* do not revolutionize, they deepen appreciation of those gentle books; his various sibilant commentaries on Coleridge build on and also enrich the work of his predecessors.

But it is Saint Augustine's *Confessions* that provide the critic with his happiest hunting-ground, for he deals here with a consummate rhetorician describing in powerfully charged theological language the central crisis of his own intimate life. Here "logology" with its gift for fanning out families of semi-cognate words like a deck of cards, for shuttling between high and low levels of speech, for seeing the personal in the abstract and vice versa, not only delights the spectator but illuminates the text. Like a lot of Burke's best work, his discussion of the *Confessions* is a personal performance, as with frock coat, white gloves, and strobe lights; yet as a demonstration of a slowly matured and fully grasped intellectual system, it goes far beyond flash. The book of which it forms a part, *The Rhetoric of Religion*, is "but it more complex." And this is why, in attempting to summarize Burke's "doctrine", one is always haunted by the memory of innumerable little cordons and afterthoughts, reconsiderations and reformulations, which he is continually affixing to the work he has already done. The structure grows, and as it were from the inside out - as if the very statues in their niches continued to enlarge by a queer kind of individual vitality, even while the cathedral itself was still rising.

Such, in the briefest of briefs, is the broad plan of Burke's thought - so far. Studying works of literature with such preoccupations in mind leads to frequent brilliant insights, both literary and philosophical. Though, as logology applies to be more inclusive than either, even Burke's best work, when seen from outside his special circumference of concerns, often looks like fly-blows. A further difficulty is his idiosyncratic and often indecent vocabulary of "victimage", "god-terms", "terminative screens", "the Upward Way", and the like. While they may account in part for the rage felt by professional philosophers with Burke's work, they delight the practised Burkeist with a sense of metaphorical amplitude, of language being taxed to the utmost. In some degree, it is true, every critic is

## Dangerously indignant

Nell Corcoran

NEAL BOWERS

Theodore Roethke: *The Journey from I to Otherwise*  
22pp. University of Missouri Press.  
£13.50.  
0 862 0347 7

What danger does Roethke's poetry pose? The answer, when trying to bring Joyce and Yeats into relation, is: the heat of identifications. Neal Bowers' book, which wants to bring man's depression and mysticism into some relation, and to interpret Theodore Roethke's poetry in the light of it, might be thought to risk such a danger; but it suffers in fact from a sloppiness of identifications. In the preface alone, man's depression and mysticism are said to be "one and the same", "closely resemble" each other, and to be "the same thing". Elsewhere, they are said to be "parallel", and occasionally they are made equivalent: "manic (or mystic)".

Since both manic depression and mysticism are, as Bowers frequently admits, notoriously difficult to define, this lack of definition and clarity of focus are not conducive to clarity of argument. What the book's thesis seems to reduce to is a result that a pattern can be discovered in Roethke's

poetry which has interesting correspondences to the mystical pattern of awakening, purgation, illumination, dark night and union as defined in Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*; a work with which Roethke was clearly very familiar. But even this thesis, which seems acceptable enough, at least in part, is stated in an unacceptable way when we are told that "while Roethke may not have been a mystic, his poetry is unquestionably mystical". Undecided terminology finds a focus here, I think, in unintelligibility.

The actual pattern as Bowers traces it is, however, intelligible, since it has always been clear that Roethke's work is intimately involved in the psychological processes of regression, and in the will towards union with the external, natural world. In an attempt to discover personal wholeness, it will be clear enough to most readers of the poetry how, in some rather vague way, Underhill's terminology may be applied to these processes. Unfortunately, the effort can do little with the poetry at any level other than that of the simply descriptive. There is little discrimination among the poems, and the still vexed question of form in the later work is largely unexamined. If one seeks something factitious about the exegesis, one is all the more ready to feel that Bowers's pattern belongs to a rather procrustean way with the poetry; and that this study misses something important about Roethke.

Venus is clearly the sexual predator in the poem, and the boy's slaying of Adonis corresponds better to the myth of Revolution than to anything Shakespeare could have known. Hunting was not a middle-class activity in Shakespeare's day, nor did it carry forth; the objections are innumerable. Seemingly unimpressed with his own allegory, Burke shifts briefly to another one: Venus as mother-figure tries to seduce Adonis, a young man suffering from Oedipal guilt; the boy now converts appropriately to homosexuality. But this twist, though undeniably it adds overtones, does nothing to tidy up the poem, to which Burke now proposes to apply a "socioanalytic" interpretive process. And just here, where the self-respecting reader must surely be able to point of throwing in the towel, things come abruptly clear. For in the new process,

emphasis is placed upon the hierarchic mystery (the principle of secular divinity, with its range of embarrassment, courtship, modesty, insult, standoffishness, its possible meteorological dignifications, its scenic embodiment in the worldly equivalent of temples, ritual vestments, rare charismatic vessels, and the like).

The sacramental hierarchy first celebrated in *Venus and Adonis* is ruined by the action of the poem: the itself is overthrown. Venus has been outclassed, Adonis, though partly apotheosized, is lost in the process; the poem ends on Venus's bitter prophecy of a world turned upside down, for converted to endless cruelty and conflict. Burke's erratic yet triumphant analysis suggests a way in which Shakespeare's poem evokes from a world of secular status a complex mystery to which it gives luminous presence; it suggests a social shining through a sexual story. And I think this is a conclusion worth waiting at working for.

At his best, then, Kenneth Burke is a richly rewarding writer about literature, as about other topics; his failures, which like everything else about him are not trifling, might be said to be the old-fashioned tendency to call "followers" or "disciples" what he himself is not. Those who are attracted to Burke are drawn by his independence, his energy, his lively irreverence; and the last is not the least of these. Applying to him, one is more than ever in his spirit, his thought could not be so held in the end, if it were not ready sometimes to sound foolish along the way. One must grasp thoughtfully what one can receive, and overlook the failings as those of great man who took many chances in his behalf when it would have been easy to avoid them - and who merits, in return, nothing less than our affection.

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181pp. Brighton: Harvester. £12.95.  
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A quarter of a century ago, personal matters - friendship, marriage - seemed an unfit topic for research: intangible, and tawdry too, in that the private subtleties of human exchange might be turned, by means of research, into something public and dull. Such preconceptions have since softened, and marriage has come to be seen as a mystery worth unpacking. Of the strategies open, the psychoanalytic has held the most promise. Books like Laing and Esterson's *Saneity, Madness and the Family*, and, more recently, Robert Stoller's studies of sex and gender, have been received as especially remarkable, in that they offer a glimpse into the abyss, the chaos that habit can serve to disguise.

Meanwhile, empirical research has plodded on its way; and summarizing statements are now beginning to appear. Of the books under review, one is a pot-boiler, devised for the fast-food market, by one of academic psychology's most distinctive voices; the other a conspectus by a member of the up-and-coming.

To those who still place faith in the scholarly virtues, the style of Hans J. Eysenck's, 'I Do' is a shock. The reduction of research to toothsome morsels, each a paragraph or two long, with headings like "A fix on happiness", "Vive la difference", "Fem (male) fatale?", and "Toying with the liberal use of cartoons (some quite good) and of illustrations (uniformly awful); and the interposition of questionnaires and summaries of other people's research, all this makes for a sense of fun, but also for muddle. While the professor and his ghost have been at pains to be clear, sentence

## Functioning, or not

Anthony Clare

PRUDENCE TUNNADINE  
*The Making of Love*  
22pp. Cape. £8.95.  
0 224 01948 1

How many people have sexual problems? In his survey of sexual behaviour in young people, Michael Schofield reported that 57 per cent of his British subjects reported sexual problems of some sort, suggesting that having sexual difficulties is statistically speaking, the "norm". Five years ago, a paper appeared in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* entitled "Frequency of Sexual Dysfunction in 'Normal' Couples".

The inverted commas around "normal" appeared justified by the comments in the paper, for the authors found that in analysing the responses of 100 well-educated, happily married American couples to a questionnaire, 40 per cent of the men and 63 per cent of the women reported some degree of sexual difficulty and/or dissatisfaction. As a much serious discussion of the possible methodological shortcomings of the study, the authors concluded that sexual dysfunctions "were more likely to reflect a combination of education deficits, inhibitions, physiological problems, and interpersonal conflicts". There was some comfort drawn from the fact that the couples involved were apparently able to tolerate a relatively high frequency of specific sexual dysfunctions and still feel very positive about their sexual relations and their marriages.

paper I wondered how long it would be before those hundred couples, moved by the heightened marital and sexual expectations of the times, would add their demands to the clamour for "therapy" which is a feature of contemporary medical services. Faced with the latest in a long line of books devoted to the subject of sexual harmony, I wonder yet again whether Prudence Tunnadine's serious, solid and reasonable paper that there is more to reassure people that there is more to marriage than optimally functioning genitalia. Or whether they will merely water the seeds of discontent.

That there are people, and many of them too, who experience serious sexual problems; problems such as premature ejaculation, impotence, vaginismus, anorgasmia, is unarguable. And Dr Tunnadine, adopting a no-nonsense, factual style, provides numerous and highly readable examples. She and her colleagues at the Institute of Psychosocial Medicine insist that they avoid treating people as "cases" and prefer to see them as "people who are unhappy, yearn for knowledge, sympathy, information and support". The theoretical basis for the work is eclectic although the book is leavened throughout by a psychoanalytic cast which injects such notions as the Electra complex and castration phantasies at the most unexpected moments. However, it is far from clear to what extent, if at all, a psychoanalytic training is necessary for someone to be a sexual counsellor, although it does not appear to matter very much because virtually everything that Tunnadine and her colleagues do can be justified by appealing to a much less complicated explanatory system.

Listening, coaching, reassuring, being prepared to let the patient see it

# Relaters, good or bad

Liam Hudson

by sentence, the connecting fabric of argument suffers, and it does so both in detail and in the broader sweep.

Professor Eysenck's central contention seems simplicity itself. Some of us are born happy, others not. If we are born happy, we will usually have happy marriages; if not, we won't. He also points out that while life tends to marry like as far as intelligence and personal attractiveness go, like shows no tendency to marry like in the realm of personality. His recommendation to the young is that they should "know themselves", and that they should seek mates whose personalities resemble their own. But if this means more than that the happy should know that they are happy, and seek out others who are happy, while the sad should know that they are sad and seek out others who are sad, this is not clearly explained.

Without doubt, Eysenck has a sharp eye for detail and an inventive turn of mind. One looks for excitement, therefore, in the fine grain of the research he describes. Here and there, one finds it. He touches, for example, on the marriages of twins, commenting that when pairs of twins marry one another, the paths their matrimonial careers follow are in every observed instance the same. One would surely like to know more about the matrimonial choices of identical twins, especially those reared apart. Unbeknownst to one another, do they choose the same sort of spouse, and do their marriages come unstuck for the same sort of reason? Unfortunately, the professor and his ghost have already moved on.

At another point, Eysenck reports that the happily married women are those who express higher satisfaction with their sex lives than do their husbands - a surprising detail, because it is usually husbands who report the greater satisfaction. We await elucidation. But what we get is comment as offhand as it is vague: "The best advice I can offer is that women should try to increase their own sexual satisfaction scores, just as they should be encouraged to increase their scores on libido". Are women being encouraged to be more libidinous, one wonders, in order to get higher scores on the professor's tests; or, a more radical suggestion, to get higher scores

on his tests in order to become more libidinous? And what of the implication that happily married women are happy not because they enjoy their sex lives, but because they enjoy them more than do their husbands? We are left in mid-air. The professor's mind, you sense, is elsewhere.

'I Do' has been assembled on the premise that readers' minds will close if any topic lasts longer than a television advertisement; and that they will close, too, if asked to witness the



One of eighty-two line drawings by Tomi Ungerer, reproduced from *Rigor Mortis* (Zürich: Diogenes. 3 257 00319 6).

movement from evidence to argument at first hand. Even if substantially correct, it is a saddening position to have reached. It is a relief of sorts to turn to Steve Duck. *Friends, For Life* is altogether more patient. In it, the author seeks to describe the steps whereby friendships of varying degrees of intimacy occur. Rather than talking about test scores he casts himself in the role of a natural historian. The establishment of a relationship, he stresses, is very much a matter of skills which, if used, he, we can acquire.

Dr Duck has a lazy way with a sentence, however. The nanny who raps our knuckles each time we dribble or leak seems to play no part in his psychic life. As a psychologist, one learns to accept shoddy sentences as part of the puritanism of science: the belief that research should not rely on

the blandishments of style in order to put the good news across. But, here, deeper misgivings stir. Consider this sample from page 44: "The effects of self-esteem are often general and affect all of someone's behaviour, not just actions in a beginning relationship. However, researchers have also discovered other psychological willingness to become involved in relationships. Individuals have other general friendship drives that affect their vigilance and their trust of other people..." And so on.

"A beginning relationship", "psychological governors", "general friendship drives": dubious clusters of adjectives and nouns limp after one another across the page. These, it might be said, are the rhythms and cadences that give the social sciences a bad name, creating in our Prime Minister, among others, the urge to squeeze the new universities between finger-nail and thumb. But is Duck simply being careless? I think not. In his quiet way, he is luring his readers towards an ideological conclusion of deep significance: one which ignores any distinction of principle between friendship and passion, liking and loving, acquaintanceship and intimacy. Our relation with lover or spouse is in essence the same as the one we strike up with doctor or air hostess, only more so. "Clever and deft relaters are good at light, quick touches on the srsms, or perhaps they straighten someone's collar, or tap them lightly in a way intended to indicate what sort of feeling the partner has about being touched." And the intimacy that results from the exercise of these social skills? Duck is no man for romantic rancies. "Indeed", he reassures us, teetering to the brink of illiteracy to do so, "one definition of intimacy depends on 'what you scratch in front of whom and whose it is'!"

While Eysenck offers science in the service of a reassuringly old-fashioned conception of marriage and its rewards, Duck is, I suspect, more revolutionary: "In fact sexual activity does not distinguish husband-wife pairs from many other sorts of couple..." The activity that separates married couples from everyone else is that they spend more time watching TV together! The baffled cravings, the fertile ambivalences and contradictions of passionate attachment are hygienically removed. The Dostoevskian heritage is expunged. Do we believe Duck? Is he describing a shit that has atreney occurred in the way most of us behave, or is he conducting a polemic? I put down *Friends, For Life* uncertainly, but knowing, in any case, that if enough polemical books are written and believed, they become descriptions by default.

Faced with this depressing prospect, each of us scratching a pal in the privacy of our lodgings, I discovered Eysenck's vision an unforeseen compensation. If we are indeed the pawns of the genetic code, at least the stubborn individuality of our desires is guaranteed. Armed with a faith in our resilience, we can then address a centrally placed mystery around which both 'I Do' and *Friends, For Life* skirt. Namely, that when we fall in love and plight our troth, we do so with rapt attention but, as often as not, with a person who is inappropriate. Eysenck's answer is that our behaviour is in this respect random; that we live in a state of pnumilia. Notoriously, though, the scientifically inclined describe as "random" those complex causal processes that they lack the means to analyse or understand. It is here that psychoanalytic writers have a head start that neither Professor Eysenck's text nor Dr Duck's begins to threaten.

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# The inferno of relativism

Hugh Thomas

PAUL JOHNSON

*A History of the Modern World from 1917 to the 1980s*  
817pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.  
£16.50.  
0297 782266

Paul Johnson has written a remarkable book which is more complex than it seems at first sight. It is a powerful, lively, compelling and provocative political history of the world since 1917: the political element is always decisive, the sciences having only a modest role and the arts figuring merely as illustration. Though chronological, the book devotes thematic chapters to what Mr Johnson thinks of as the scandal of the Versailles Settlement; the fraud of the Russian Revolution; the contemptible collapse of China and the fearsome rise of Japan in the 1930s; the Nazis; the feebleness of the democracies and their empires between 1919 and 1939; the American dream in the 1920s and then, almost worst of all for the author, Roosevelt. There is a skilful medley together of all these elements in a long section on the Second World War.

The post-war world is considered in the same fashion, though the issues are less amenable to sharp definition. Johnson takes as much pleasure in pointing to the failures of post-imperial Africa in his chapter entitled "Caliban's Kingdoms" as he does to the Chinese chaos before 1939. His chapters on what he sees as the anachronistic India of Nehru and the bloodstained China of Mao are also unrelentingly contemptuous, well-written polemics of power and fury. But the great merit of the book considered as political history is that it makes the historical record since the Second World War exceptionally interesting and diverting, even exhilarating: a really remarkable achievement, even if the effect is obtained largely by dwelling on the evils of our time.

At another and, presumably in the mind of the author more important, level, the book is a moral tale, with a purpose. This purpose is explained in the first chapter, "A Relativistic World", which begins with an account of the intellectual and moral consequences of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Just as this once used to be a straight line and crooked ones, there was once guilt and innocence, evil and good. Now there is relativism. Things fell apart, the best lacked all conviction and the worst... But Johnson's view is not so much Yeatsian as Nietzschean: "The greatest evil of recent times, that God is dead, is beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe." Among the "advanced races, the decline and collapse of the religious impulse left a vacuum. The history of modern times is essentially about how 'that vacuum has been filled'. The most successful candidate to fill it has been this 'will to power for its own sake'. In place of religion, there has been secular ideology. Those who, in the past, were in the ranks of the totalitarian clergy became totalitarian politicians. Not by chance was Stalin a failed seminarian. "The end of the old order, with an unguided world adrift in...

soothe these pages. There is no sympathy for those who merely "wait the spark from heaven". Few of the leaders who have come to power since 1917 escape Johnson's castigation. Lenin's personal and public inhumanity; Hitler's colossal delusions; Mao's brutal vulgarity; Stalin's conspiratorial appetite for blood; Amin's negligent ruthlessness; Bokassa's fatuous self-indulgence; Mussolini's doomed dreams; Sukarno's follies; Castro's single-minded pursuit of tyranny—they are all here, left-wing dictators and right-wing ones, prophets and philosophers, dons and dullards, soldiers and civilians.

Nor is it only the obvious villains who come under Johnson's well-directed fire. Equally at risk are the well-meaning, the self-deceiving, and the ineffective. In Johnson's hands, such figures as Gandhi and Nehru, Kennedy and Carter, Eden and Chamberlain are made to appear as forsaken as the crazed despots with whom they ineffectively clashed. Roosevelt, Keynes, Freud and, above all, Edwin Montagu, the liberal Indian politician whom it is plausible to see as the intellectual author of Independence—a terrible failure of nerve for Johnson—are presented as atrocious too.

This emphasis on men, rather than measures, statistics or economic forces, is a notable feature of the book. Thus, in talking of Hitler and Stalin, in the "watershed year 1941", Johnson says that the "historian cannot but be astounded by the decisive role of the independent will". Hitler and Stalin "played chess with humanity". Stalin's diseased personality led him to sign the Nazi-Soviet pact without consulting anyone; Hitler alone determined on a war of annihilation against Russia; their lieutenants "obeyed blindly, or in apathetic terror". The nations over which they ruled "seem to have had no choice but to stumble in their wake towards ruin". Naturally, since it is, says Johnson, "when the moral residues of religion are removed that the power to suspend or unleash catastrophic events does not devolve on the impersonal benevolence of the masses, but falls into the hands of men who are isolated by the very totality of their evil natures".

Mr Johnson often captures the personality of his victims brilliantly. The now forgotten leaders of Japan and China, in particular those of the years before and during the Second World War, are especially well brought out. Often, as in the cases of Gandhi, Montagu and Hammarskjöld, the portrait is little more than caricature and, in the case of the last two, very unfair caricature too. But Johnson has no wish to be charitable. Like Dante, in Virgil's company, looking into the next world, he sees nothing much of which to approve. The few persons whom he places in *Paradiso* are almost as grotesque as his villains. Presidents Calvin Coolidge and Warren G. Harding are the real heroes, followed by Eisenhower and, a little less explicitly, Nixon. The only British statesman of whom Johnson appears to approve is Churchill. But de Gaulle, Adenauer, de Gasperi and Truman also "come through" well.

The general intellectual framework behind these pages is interesting. We read of a "crisis of the modern age" of the peace-makers in 1919 who rejected the "traditional idea" and "continuing economic interests" which before 1914 had urged the nationalities of Central Europe to "live together". This "tradition" exercised in, might already have been in the process of being torn apart by 1910 or so. But once that was complete, the essential legitimacy which old Europe had once had was destroyed. It was the same with the Chinese and Ottoman Empires. Essentially Johnson thus turns his back not only on the twentieth century but on everything which has happened since the Enlightenment. Indeed, one cannot help wondering about the Enlightenment itself.

After all that, the reader is bound to wonder what the conclusion will be. What general moral position will Johnson reach at the climax of his fury? Arnold's vision on Dover Beach? Surely he is too violent a hater of evil to

leave the traveller quite without hope? As might be expected, there is a good passage about Pope John Paul II. But the main conclusion is odd. First, Johnson is encouraged by the increasing appreciation that the state cannot do much to save us after all, despite the long-held popular view to the contrary; it has "proved itself an insatiable spender, and unrivaled waster... the great killer of all time". But also, as a consequence of the discovery of the double helix at Cambridge (a university which otherwise comes in for abuse because of certain over-publicized events there in the 1930s), and the development of sociobiology, there is hope that man can be genetically programmed to improve by conscious action. Because of this, the book ends on an optimistic note, and one for which the previous 700-page trek through hell and purgatory has not prepared us. But can this be done without "a return to God... Or at least some other transcendental philosophy"? And what would the Pope say of such programming? To omit any discussion of that question, in view of the importance of the theme throughout the book, seems a little illogical.

That societies are unlikely to prosper, or even survive, unless they have a generally accepted code is a proposition on which most of us would be in broad agreement with Paul Johnson. But religion is not the only possible source of such a code. Religious societies, too, have often been violent, turbulent and unjust. The sufferings of present-day Iran stem from a régime which demands strict adherence to religious laws. There have been Christian societies in which iniquity flourished, and arbitrariness prevailed. Franco's rule between 1939 and 1945 is a case in point.

I had hoped that the conclusion of Johnson's book would have made clear how North America, Europe, Australia, Japan and the democratic countries in Latin America can make common cause, intellectually or ideologically, and so preserve what is now generally defined as "the West" or "the free world" (this, despite certain inadequacies of the spirit, such as religious doubt, which are not likely to vanish by order). In this, the reader may be a little disappointed.

I have also one or two reservations about Johnson's attitude to Leninism, and hence Marxism-Leninism, a theory which occupies a large part of his book. Not, to be sure, that I challenge his view that Lenin, not Stalin, initiated the concentration camps, the political police, the contempt for the rule of law, and guilt by association, all things on which Stalin later built so successfully his own chambers of horror. That is well depicted by Johnson; and with irresistible logic. But, as is perhaps natural in a pupil of A. J. P. Taylor (himself influenced in this by Namier, who so despised ideas), he underestimates the ideological factor. Marxism-Leninism may be a false ethic but it is nevertheless the fundamental



A pen and ink drawing by Tom Ungerer. For publication details see page 711.

collection of beliefs and tactics which have been used to justify the policies of Lenin and his successors. It may not be taken seriously by the Russian people but it is surely considered very seriously by their leaders.

It is inevitable in works of such length that there should be mistakes. Books like this cannot be written to everyone's satisfaction. Experts on special themes will light on Johnson's treatment of Hammarskjöld in the Congo, say, or Dr Adenauer's dismissal in 1945 from the post of mayor of Cologne. Among subjects neglected by Johnson, there is the treatment of the German population of east and central Europe after 1945; never had the policy of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" been more vigorously imposed than in that supposedly post-biblical era, as the neglected but indefatigable Alfred de Zayas has shown.

There is also an important passage about population which calls for correction. Johnson attributes increase in population generally to scientific medicine, and to public health schemes; so that when the death rate is out, the birth rate may remain at its old "replacement rate". Thereafter, a rise in living standards will cause the birth rate to fall. Between the first and second of these phases, however, "population jumps and [this] may produce violent consequences". According to Johnson, in Europe this process began with the Industrial Revolution, and was complete by the 1970s. This seems to me to be an incorrect picture of what occurred in

Europe, though it may have some relevance to what is happening now in the rest of the world. The truth is that population grew in Europe (including Russia), in Asia and probably in Africa, between 1700 and 1850, without the slightest contribution to improved medicine, whose beneficial consequences followed Lister's and Pasteur's innovations and achievements in the 1860s.

In Evelyn Waugh's war-time *Sword of Honour*, the central figure, the aristocratic Guy Crichton, hears of Churchill's decision to keep Stalin in 1941. He asks one of his acquaintances is distressed, Johnson and Crichton see eye to eye over that decision, as over other things. The great difference between them, though, is as elsewhere, marks Johnson's work—as well as the ruthlessness, and wit, the lack of compromise, the almost physical dislike of weakness.

Early on in his book, Johnson says Freud: "Not for the first time, the prophet in his fifties, long in the wilderness, had suddenly found a new audience." And, he goes on, "by encapsulating emergent trends over a wide range of subjects, he presented, with brilliant panache and masterly confidence, ideas which had already been formulated in the minds of the élite". Words which perhaps ought to be applied to this author himself, though his remote blemishes—"This I've, sir, not Ivory"—Mr Johnson's punishing stand. Joe outside the politician who falls to live up to it.

He moves on to notice a further shift in the concept of honourable conduct: the emergence of the idea that even devotion to Decatur's "My country,

## POLITICS

# Feeling for a foothold

Otto Pick

BRABANT SEN GUPTA

*The Afghan Syndrome: How to live with Soviet Power*  
296pp. Croom Helm. £12.95.  
0709 0477 0

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has so far been somewhat inconclusive as a military operation, but, as Brabant Sen Gupta asserts in *The Afghan Syndrome*, it has proved to be a political watershed. The book under review is not really about Afghanistan, but represents an attempt to analyse Soviet policy in a global context and to provide an outline of the international repercussions of the crisis. It is, however, an exaggeration to claim, as Dr Gupta does, that it marked "the emergence of the Soviet Union as a global, interventionist power". The Soviet Union's rise to superpower status began with the victories of the Soviet Army in 1943, it was confirmed by the explosion of the first Soviet atom bomb in 1949, and Khrushchev's Cuban adventure was an early attempt to assert the USSR's position as a world power with world-wide interests. In 1962, the USSR lacked the means to back up its claims but much has been done since then to redress the balance.

Brezhnev's main achievement was to have questioned to his successors a military machine which aspires to parity with the United States and which disposes of truly global capabilities. The expansion of the Soviet Navy, accelerated though not necessarily

initiated by the outcome of the Cuban missile crisis, and the decline of Western influence in Africa and Latin America, caused largely by Western mistakes, have played their part in transforming the correlation of forces. The USSR certainly gave evidence of interventionist tendencies in Africa and elsewhere long before the invasion of Afghanistan, and its actions in the Horn of Africa demonstrated its ability to sustain such policies.

Interpretations of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan differ widely, but two trends seem to predominate. The first interpretation claims that the Soviet move into Afghanistan was merely the first step on the road which would bring Russian troops to the Gulf of Oman, within striking distance of the Straits of Hormuz through which oil tankers proceeding from the Persian Gulf have to pass. It is thought possible that the USSR would be able to take advantage of the instabilities which afflict Pakistan by encouraging irredentist movements in Baluchistan and, if necessary, intervening to support them in order to gain a further foothold on its march towards the Gulf. There is little doubt that the ramshackle and reactionary régime in Pakistan could be destabilized without much difficulty. On the other hand, if the Soviets were to take this plunge, the risks would be incalculable. The effect on Soviet influence in the Middle East and among the uncommitted countries would be catastrophic, the conflict between Iraq and Iran would probably be replaced by an anti-Soviet coalition and the United States would find it almost impossible to stand aside. Soviet foreign policy, though

essentially opportunistic in its approach, has been marked by a considerable degree of caution, which was only abandoned on one occasion, in 1962. The Cuban adventure proved to be one of the nails in Khrushchev's coffin, and it is extremely unlikely that Brezhnev, who authorized the invasion of Afghanistan, or Andropov, who still has to consolidate his personal position, would have wished to follow their predecessor's example. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that should the Russians ever want to project their power southwards through Pakistan, they would first have to control Afghanistan.

There is, of course, a simpler explanation. The bloody conflicts among the various so-called Communist factions in Kabul might have provided an opportunity for Chinese initiatives and were rapidly creating a power vacuum in a very sensitive area. The leaders of the Soviet Union could not tolerate the prospect that the control of an important buffer state on their southern frontier might fall into hostile hands, and they also could not allow an allegedly "socialist" régime, which had been initially welcomed by Moscow, to collapse. The relative failure of their military intervention had obviously not been anticipated.

Although Dr Gupta tends to support the second of these theses, he perhaps wisely makes no attempt to arrive at a definite judgment about Soviet motives. In the final analysis, the Soviet Union was driven both by the perceived need to secure a threatened advantage and the natural desire to seize an opportunity to assert Soviet

power—it is impossible to guess which factor carried the greater weight.

Regardless of why the Russians decided to invade the fact that they did so has served to transform the international situation. The crisis in Afghanistan has acted as a catalyst in the disintegration of détente. It caused President Carter to withdraw the SALT II agreements before their ratification could be refused by the US Senate and this interrupted the process of negotiating about arms control for a year. It encouraged those in the Carter administration who supported Brezhnev's policy of playing the China card for all its worth in order to limit the USSR's opportunities for diplomatic manoeuvre. Ultimately, it provided tangible arguments for the advocates of greatly increased US expenditure on arms, who claimed that the Soviet Union's propensity to use force when necessary must be countered by an American capability to respond with equal weight. This last view has dominated the thinking of the Reagan administration and has been largely instrumental in bringing about the present impasse in East-West relations.

Gupta provides a most perceptive account of American reactions and he also offers a convincing analysis of the ambivalent diplomacy pursued by both India and Pakistan. Mrs Gandhi's equivocal attitude reduces any influence which India might have been able to exercise, but at least General Zia, by rejecting US offers of aid in February 1980, perhaps inadvertently prevented the crisis from escalating to unmanageable proportions. Indian and Pakistani responses to recent events in Afghanistan have again demonstrated that the heirs of the Raj are much more concerned with the regional conflict between themselves than with the wider question of relations between the two superpowers. Unfortunately, Gupta

meets no attempt to probe West European reactions to Afghanistan—the Europeans have on the whole held to the view that the Americans overreacted and they have clung to the residues of détente, rejecting the view that what they regarded as a purely regional crisis in a remote part of the world should be allowed to have an overriding impact on East-West relations. This divergence has been accentuated by events in Poland and has undoubtedly affected the West's ability to cope with Soviet diplomatic initiatives.

Gupta concludes with a stimulating final chapter on "How to Live with Soviet Power". Although he overestimates the Soviet Union's ability to control Afghanistan by military means and attaches too much importance to the Soviet intervention as an indication of Soviet power, he argues with conviction and reason that the superpowers must learn to live with one another in "mutually recognized equality" and that the middle powers must act together to bring this about. He advises the United States against "blending revolutionary ferment in the third world and Soviet might into a threat theory of unprecedented proportions" and regards "American ability to stem the tide of radical change in the third world" to be as limited as "Soviet ability to engineer third world revolutions". The present international environment is very different from the conditions which led to the confrontations of the "cold war", and the international system cannot return to a state of affairs when it was dominated by the overwhelming power of the United States. A realistic *modus vivendi* in a very literal sense of the term can only be arrived at, Dr Gupta pleads, if "the Americans take a fresh hard look at the grammar of living together with a second global power". There are many in Western Europe who would agree with him.

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## Objects of devotion

M. R. D. FOOT

*Honour Among Men and Nations: Transformations of an Idea*  
108pp. University of Toronto Press.  
£11.40 (paperback, 25).  
0 8020 2459 9

Geoffrey Best's lectures in 1981 at the University of Western Ontario, on the Joshua Goodman foundation, derive from his study of *Humanity in Warfare*, which came out in the same year. With a keen historian's eye, he assesses the weight carried by the concept of honour in human conduct during the last two centuries, mainly, but not solely, on battlefields. He follows Norman Thompson's concept (published in 1973) that the Jacobins nationalized honour, in revolutionary France in the early 1790s. He understands what preoccupies officer

classes, why it is that some officers can so easily get worked up about points of honour, how it is that others can so easily put their consciences to rest. He concentrates mainly on the cases of France and Germany. France racked by the Dreyfus case, and by the choices between Pétain and de Gaulle, Germany under that most malodorous of Kaiser Wilhelm II and under Hitler. He is struck, as Allied generals were struck in 1944-5, by "the paradoxical phenomenon of such genuine respect for legality, such cult of civility, and such sense of honour in the army, which twice within twenty-five years lost itself to the most begemonic imperialism on the European continent and, on the second occasion, missed every opportunity over ten years to avoid the Nazi stain".

He moves on to notice a further shift in the concept of honourable conduct: the emergence of the idea that even devotion to Decatur's "My country,

right or wrong" needs in the end to give way to devotion to human kind as a whole. Neither the League of Nations, with so many great powers absent, nor the United Nations with its strong resolutions and weak sanctions, have yet provided an adequate focus for men of honour, whose ancient devotion was to a medieval monarch's person. Yet the idea of honour remains well dug in, even in communist revolutionary states. In a postscript, devoted to topics he had time to pursue in the lecture, Professor Best reminds his readers that, in the USSR, one of the most heinous of military crimes is the so-called "insubordination rush" over the precipice of war lies before humanity. It is most likely to lie in "some very broadened beyond Decatur's of honourable men and women about the subject of interest and importance."

More problematic was the appearance a few days before Dr Medvedev's publication of a photograph in the Western press of an alleged "deceit". Andropov, supported by state aids, and looking as ruthless as the ruler of all the Russias as it is possible to imagine, raised the question of how long we can expect to see him at the helm, and whether the kind of jockeying for the succession that took place while Brezhnev was physically in decline is now in progress. It also provokes the intriguing speculation about the degree of control exercised today by the Soviet authorities, who do not seem to be able either to prevent such a photograph from being taken or stop its transmission abroad. The lack of change made by the Plenum in the composition of the Politburo is closely paralleled by what happened towards the end under Brezhnev: the Politburo was left completely unaltered at the twenty-sixth Communist Party Congress in 1982, and this was generally interpreted as symptomatic of the desire to postpone change until the departure of Brezhnev. There is the same premonition of change in the Politburo today.

In this context, the promotion of Romanov, the wild and disolute First Secretary of the Leningrad Party organization, to the Central Secretariat in Moscow may be significant. Romanov is already in the Politburo, but one must, in practice, be in the Central Secretariat as well before one can enter the succession

race. His elevation, therefore, puts two relatively young candidates in the field: Romanov is sixty, the other, Gorbachev, is fifty-two. Since an apparent requirement for Politburo approval, Romanov's new post would seem to indicate the existence of a group which would resist Gorbachev's succession as General Secretary, and would suggest that the parties are already lining up.

Of Andropov the man, as Medvedev rightly points out, it is impossible to write for lack of information. He adds a certain amount of rumour, based on newspaper reports. But since a good deal purveyed by correspondents is inevitably KGB disinformation (Andropov's "liberalism", for example) it is difficult to attach much value to such conjectures. One is on more certain ground when dealing with the style of government of individuals, and when analysis is limited squarely on one's knowledge of the Soviet government and its workings. The question of the Chairmanship of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, for instance, much ink has been spilt in the newspapers (and by Medvedev in his book) on Andropov's failure to secure this Chairmanship at the outset. But the Chairmanship is, in fact, a time-consuming post without influence of any kind. Brezhnev's acquisition of it very late in his career was due solely to his inordinate vanity. There is no reason to suppose that Andropov is particularly vain. According to Medvedev, Andropov promised the post to Chernenko during the run-up to the succession, and then went back on his word. A much more likely explanation is that he has tried to persuade his rival—or the nearest to rival he has—to take this highly honourific post, which would be the effect of removing him from the really influential Secretariat and headship of its important General Department. When he failed to eliminate Chernenko, he took the job himself.

Medvedev seems to me to attach far too little importance to Andropov's many years' background as head of the security service. He even suggests at one point that, as an ex-politician, he may be able to "assuage conservative fear of reform". This is a very unlikely proposition in the case of a General Secretary who lost no time in elevating one security officer to the Politburo, and another to head the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Besides, the whole of

On the whole, this is a sensible, if unexciting, book. Dr Medvedev has assembled the available facts and has examined them critically. He has added a good deal of informed Moscow gossip which, no doubt, emanates from his historian brother, Roy. He has not thrown a great deal of light on what we can expect from the new ruler of the USSR. But that is not his fault.



# A sovereign and his psyche

Roger Lockyer

CHARLES CARLTON

Charles I: The Personal Monarch  
426pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.  
£14.95.  
0 71009485 X

Charles Carlton's choice of sub-title for his biography suggests that this is meant to be a life of Charles the man rather than Charles the politician – though in the case of kings it is difficult, and perhaps unwise, to separate the two. In order to aid him in his task of analysing the character of this most enigmatic of monarchs, Carlton calls in the psychiatrists. This seems a sensible approach, but the trouble is that we have very little information about Charles's private life and inner feelings – nothing to compare, alas, with the wonderfully detailed, intimate and vivid account of the young Louis XIII left us by his physician, Hérouard. In the absence of facts Carlton resorts to speculation, but too many of his assertions are based upon flimsy foundations. He takes it for granted that Charles went through a phase of "mild homosexuality", and a few pages later adds that because of an unduly prolonged adolescence his homosexual tendencies became more pronounced and he developed the "submissive, feminine and narcissistic self-sufficiency" characteristic of this state. The casual reader may take all this at face value, but if he consults the footnotes he will find that the only references are to the works of modern writers, ranging from Freud to D. J. West and including an essay on "The unsuccessful adolescence of Heinrich Himmler". The absence of contemporary sources is not surprising since in fact there is no hard evidence to support the proposition that Charles ever had any homosexual tendencies or

was feminine or narcissistically self-sufficient (whatever this may mean).

Yet if Carlton is unduly speculative in his analysis of Charles's character he is at least trying to get behind the facade, which is all that many biographers give us. This makes his simplistic treatment of Charles's father all the more puzzling. The work of historians during the past decade has radically transformed our view of James I, yet one would never gather this from Carlton. He has what one is tempted to describe as a pathological loathing for James, describing him as growing daily "more senile and stiffer" or, in a variant form, "older, stiffer and more senile", until he became "quite literally... a dirty old man". In Carlton's view, then, it was hardly surprising that when James died it was "a relief for the whole kingdom", for by that time he was "old, pathetic and boring". Yet there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that James's subjects had considerable respect and affection for their ruler. The well-informed John Chamberlain, writing in 1619 at a time when James had been seriously ill, assured his correspondent that "all men apprehend what a loss we should have if God should take him from us, and do earnestly enquire, and in general heartily wish and pray for his welfare". James was certainly getting older with every year that passed – a not uncommon fate – but he was a mere thirty-six when he ascended the English throne and only fifty-eight when he died. And far from being senile, he spent the last year of his life as Robert Ruigh showed us in his brilliant book on the 1624 parliament (1971) – fighting a vigorous, skilful and successful rearguard action in defence of his pacific policies against the combined pressures of his son and favourite.

It is Carlton's neglect of secondary sources which gives his account of the critical decade of the 1620s such an old-fashioned look. He works on

the assumption that confrontation between King and parliament was inevitable, which was far from the case; he makes the quite unjustified assertion that "if any single issue caused the breakdown of Charles's first parliament it was recusancy"; and he suggests that Charles's "determination to impose his will on parliament may have been intensified by the need to compensate for not being able to do so with his wife", which comes close to absurdity. There are, it is true, one or two places where "revisionist" views are acknowledged, but they stand out like an ill-applied veneer and merely weaken the existing interpretation without substantially modifying it.

Carlton's decision to concentrate on Charles's personality may be explained by the fact that he is obviously ill at ease in the political world of early Stuart England, as is shown by the extraordinary number of errors he perpetrates. To take just one example: in 1621 James asked parliament for supply and reminded members that during his eighteen years as King he had only received six subsidies and four fifteenths. Carlton transforms this into a statement that the King actually asked for "a subsidies and four-fifteenths" (sic), and adds the surprising information that this request was "well received". Nor is this an isolated slip. Among many others are Carlton's belief that Richard Sackville, Earl of Dorset, was a Marquis; that the Christian name of Sir Thomas Wentworth was Peter; that John Williams's successor as Lord Keeper was somebody called Sir John Conway, and that a later occupant of this high office was Secretary Windebank; that Theobalds, one of the largest houses in England, was a "lodge"; and that Greenwich Palace lies some twenty miles upstream from Whitehall.

When he moves into the non-political aspects of the eleven years' Personal Rule Carlton is more at home. He is good on Charles as an art

collector; on the details of Court life; and on the growing warmth between the King and his volatile French wife. Unreliability returns with the summoning of the Long Parliament – for despite Carlton's statement to the contrary it was not Pym who introduced the bill of attainder against Strafford – but matters improve again when the author follows the King to Oxford and traces his fortunes during the Civil War. Just as Charles shed much of his diffidence and grew in confidence now that the issues had been simplified, so Carlton sheds some of his more irritating mannerisms and produces a clear, well-supported, and at times moving account of these traumatic years. Yet even here he sabotages his own work by failing to maintain the appropriate standards of accuracy, particularly when he is quoting from primary sources. He mangles a poem by Cowley; he has Charles instructing Hamilton "to possess yourself in Edinburgh and Stirling" when what the King actually told him was "to possess yourself of

castles of Edinburgh and Stirling"; he describes how Charles, after checkmating the parliamentary forces in the West Country, wrote to Prince Rupert that "had our enemies been either deferred or of another kind, nothing but a direct miracle could have saved us"; he even manages to misquote Sir Jacob Astley's famous prayer on the battlefield of Edgehill.

In short, this is a book that one approaches with high hopes but leaves with a sense of deep disappointment. For the general reader Pauline Gregg's biography (1981) is more reliable, John Bowyer's (1975) more stylish. As for specialists in the early Stuart field, they will have to wait until the appearance of a biography of Charles I, the political monarch, which sets him within the context not only of his own time but also of the historical research which is doing so much to change our picture of it.

## Godly priorities

Anthony Fletcher

WILLIAM HUNT

The Puritan Moment: The Coming of Revolution in an English County  
367pp. Harvard University Press. £24.  
0 674 73903 5

*The Puritan Moment* is not so much a county study in the now traditional mode as a synthesis of the work of other historians, which also draws heavily on quarter-session materials at Chelmsford and contemporary pamphlet writings. William Hunt's purpose is to present an overall argument about Essex's response to national events and developments in the period from the 1570s to 1642. He has written a well-researched and stimulating book. His style is engagingly candid if sometimes brash; his zest and enthusiasm carry the story along.

The book is in two distinct halves. In the first an account of the economy of the shire is followed by a discussion of social policy and the Puritan "code of redemption" which, Hunt argues, provided its impetus. He firmly establishes the extent of early impact of poverty in Essex. However, in explaining the increasing number of landless labourers, he perhaps leans rather more heavily than the evidence warrants on the assertiveness of the landlord class and gives less emphasis than he might have done to the impersonal forces of climate and the market. Following in the footsteps of Keith Wrightson, he is good on the role of parish elites in imposing the "reformation of manners", though there is a certain imprecision about how a new policy of social order and moral reform was formulated and translated into action. The preachers' activities in the government of certain parishes are carefully delineated; magistracy and the framework of county administration remain in the background. Although he may be overstating the pervasiveness of the conflict between the godly and the profane when he says that "it divided virtually every parish in southern England", Hunt is at his best on the two cultures of Elizabethan and early Stuart England. This was a society, where those who believed it had been a merry world when there was less preaching, stood resolutely against the demanding, serious men for whom religion was an intense preoccupation, carrying its implications into every aspect of daily life.

The second half of the book contains a political narrative from 1603 to the Civil War. This sheds much new light and includes a sympathetic appraisal of the role of the key figure in local politics, from 1628, Sir Thomas Barrington. It only loses something of its originality when it reaches the period from 1640 to 1642, which has already been so well traversed by Clive Holmes. Hunt shows convincingly that an autonomous popular movement

against Charles I's régime developed in Essex. It was based on anti-Arminianism, drew strength from anti-popery and expressed itself, from 1641, through incipient sectarianism. By the summer of 1642 the Stuart valley, where long-term industrial depression had reached crisis point, was probably the most unsettled district in the whole of England. Nowhere else did economic, political and religious issues fuse so readily. This was Hunt's Puritan moment, an "awakened synthesis" of discontents which produced a significant intellectus by Essex of numbers and vigour into Parliament's war effort. Yet the brightness of his Puritan moment needs to be stressed. Hunt's narrative ends at the point when Essex's minority of really militant activists had been drawn off into the national military struggle. Much of the county's second army under the Earl of Warwick deserted when the great man of the shire resigned his command in November 1642.

Despite a vigorously argued conclusion, the two halves of the book do not cohere. To the first half, Hunt strengthens the case made previously by others that the Puritan movement was a conservative one, reinforcing social values common to the gentry and respectable classes. In the second, he adds his voice to those who see the Civil War in ideological terms, as a struggle based on fragile alliances between certain of the nobility and gentry and a sector of the people. He has studied two tendencies within the complex movement which historians summarize as Puritanism. Some Essex Puritans, he has shown, sought social reform; some, riotous, smashing stables or pulling down enclosures; some were prepared to leave their native soil to go and fight the King. What he has not shown and what needs to be considered is how far the same mind did all three things.

There is a contradiction within Hunt's story that deserves further exploration. The Puritan moment in Essex – and there was such a moment in several other counties as well – was an emotional and religious experience which threatened to betray the tradition of social order which had been at the heart of English Puritanism for some six decades. Yet Hunt argues that the Puritan movement was entirely at ease about what kind of society it was really to be. He is attracted by the apparent coexistence between godliness and repressive moral and social reform. He is also ready to remind us that "we shall not understand the godly unless we understand their fundamental assumptions, as seriously as they themselves did". He is elusive but there is no doubt that he has a good sense of what kind of society the Puritans really were. He is attracted by the apparent coexistence between godliness and repressive moral and social reform. He is also ready to remind us that "we shall not understand the godly unless we understand their fundamental assumptions, as seriously as they themselves did". He is elusive but there is no doubt that he has a good sense of what kind of society the Puritans really were.

# The condemned playboy

Julian Symons

DAVID PRYCE-JONES

Cyril Connolly: Journal and Memoirs  
304pp. Collins. £12.50.  
0 00 216546 5

A drawing by Augustus John of the young Cyril Connolly serves as jacket illustration for this book, showing a face already squarish, wavy hair a little disordered, the mouth sensual and generous. Another John drawing of the same period, frontispiece to *The Condemned Playground*, tells us more. Here a large round head rests on a plump hand, and under thick brows the eyes baffle the face's heaviness with a stare of glassy idealism, a yearning for the infinite. The present work contains no illustrations and that is a pity, for they could have shown something like a taste for the issue of the *London Magazine* that contained articles commemorating his seventieth birthday (August/September 1973) included pictures of the small boy wearing a sailor suit who received notes from his loving grandmother addressed to the Duke of Vernon, KCMG; Eton and Oxford Connolly with Robert Langdon, one of several lovers (Longdon maintained the connection between homosexuality and the English public schools by becoming headmaster of Wellington); *Enemies of France* and *Socialist Republic* supporter Connolly trudging along the road near the Franco-Spanish border; the editor of *Horizon* sleazily at ease with cigarette and wineglass; and the burly Edmund Wilson book-reviewer at his desk with pen in hand, or loitering slightly, head drooping over chair arm, books from his covetable library behind him. This last figure looks assured yet sorrowful, a defeated romantic.

Such is the progress revealed in fuller detail by an oddly shaped volume. The centre of it is the Journal, written between 1928 and 1934, with a dozen final pages taking it up to 1937. This is lengthily topped and briefly tailed by David Pryce-Jones's memoir with an effect that is occasionally awkward because incidents described in the Journal are also mentioned in the memoir. The balance also seems odd, since 120 pages are given to the life before Connolly's marriage to Jean Bakewell in 1930, while the subsequent forty-one years are disposed of in little more than twenty pages. Nevertheless, this is the nearest thing to a full-scale biography Cyril Connolly is likely to get, and David Pryce-Jones is an understanding and sympathetic biographer. He understands perfectly the Connolly device of anticipating any criticism of his conduct by making it himself, and implicitly claiming credit for his candour. "The depiction of himself as some sort of royal failure was the foundation of his success."

Thus at the peak of his reviewing firm to the 1930s he called reviewing an occupation where "only the drudgery is permanent, and where no future is secure except the certainty of turning into a hawk". In the ten years of *Horizon* he deplored at intervals the labour of editorial work, and with the circulation declining reflected that "a decade of our lives is quite enough to devote to a lost cause". With the magazine suspended for a year, the editor would have a chance to write. If he could not do so he would accept his destiny and return to editing. In the event the suspension was permanent, and the editor turned again to reviewing, succeeding Desmond MacCarthy on the *Sunday Times*. There he wrote a weekly article for more than twenty years, living quietly in a suburban "road" at Eastbourne. "Eastbourne is the right place for a man of letters," John, Bejlemo (comfortably said), and made specific reference towards some with whom he had fallen out in the past, Wyndham Lewis, Geoffrey Grigson and myself among them, by friendly reviews of their books. In vain: Lewis made scathing annotations on a copy of *The Unquiet Grave*, Grigson wrote a brief, scornful letter about the eulogies pronounced after Connolly's death.

And indeed, if one looks at the work produced and the level of the mind behind it, the eulogies do seem extraordinary, even absurd. Though he was witty, intelligent, tactful and tasteful, extremely funny – particularly in the parodies of Huxley and of fashionable 1930s Left-wing aesthetes ("Where Engels Feels to Tread") – Cyril Connolly's incurable vice, which cancelled almost all of these merits, was triviality. He was prepared to confess almost any sin, so long as he was not accused of this one. Stephen Spender, in one of the eulogies, observed rightly that "to give himself a name is... his formula for wrestling success from failure by taking failure as his subject" and Connolly's sins were certainly never less than lofty. The first paragraph of *The Unquiet Grave* makes it clear that only the best will do. "The true function of a writer is to produce a masterpiece", and nothing else is of much interest. So why not attempt the masterpiece? Too slothful, too fat, too greedy – he was ready to plead guilty on all these counts. But if you lacked the energy to produce the masterpiece that was in you, was anything else worth bothering about? From such a position of superiority he was able liapply to declare himself a failure:

At Eton with Orwell, at Oxford with Woolf. He was nobody afterwards and nothing before.

The couplet is disarming. But look of seriousness, incurable temperamental frivolity? For one interested only in masterpieces that would have been the unforgetable sin.

The triviality is amply documented in the Journal, as it is in that for 1927 which appeared in *The Condemned Playground*. A typical extract runs:

Visit from Molly Higgins who was rather charming, on to Robin's for sherry-in-the-dark. Rollo Hayes, rather tight, began doing his frog-in-the-bull act, this time about Lady Cunard. Sidney Beer arrived to fetch someone. I asked him about Salzburg. Peggy off. "O are you an Austrian?" how good. I adore Austrians. "Dinner with Rollo and Colville, political arguments, very breezy. C said he was only unhappy one week a year, Robin only happy same."

Try again, a year or two earlier:

Lunched with Ivor [Novello] and we went to the Zoo in the rain, afterwards swimming at the Wottenburg. Dinner with Harold [Nicolson] and we are all to go to theatre afterwards to a cabaret, where Gladwyn [Jebb] gives us supper. Very amusing play by Molnar, amazing how the Germans are such good and natural actors. At supper the band played the famous Berlin Tango.

This kind of thing sometimes pulled up the writer of it with a feeling that it wouldn't do. Exhortations are frequent. "What is C.V.C. going to do about it?" (the wretched state of Eng Lit around 1930). "Be more ruthless."

## Regency style

Donald A. Low

Alison Adburnham  
Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature from 1814 to 1840.  
344pp. Constable. £12.50.  
0 09 46370 2

The novel of fashionable life is one of the neglected minor strengths of early nineteenth-century English fiction, and also a vital connecting link between the age of Jane Austen and that of Thackeray and Dickens. *Silver Fork Society*, applied first to Theodore Hook (who certainly deserved it), has misled generations of readers into regarding a group of writers who include such gifted and diverse figures as the young Bulwer, T. H. Lister, and the decidedly over-ambitious but nevertheless innovative young Disraeli. These men are of interest in their own right as experimental novelists, and also as forerunners of the masters of Victorian social fiction. Also accomplished – and readable – is Catherine Gore, whose *Mothers and Daughters*

and less flabby, cease being influenced by charm and gentleness. Excellent advice, but he was unable to follow it, just as he ignored his own occasional deprecations of egotism, and his pious injunctions "to extract the greatest possible value from one's own life... one's own life will never be important while one thinks it more important than other people's". Charners and gentlemen were all around, and complementary to the Journal's triviality is its snobbery, that passion for the right people and the right places which never left him. As Pryce-Jones makes clear, he had no natural position among those who lived at ease. His father was an Army Major, the family was not rich and he was faced with the need to earn a living after leaving Oxford. He was provided with a fairly nominal post as secretary to Logan Pearsall Smith at £8 a week, which in 1926 was by no means a nominal salary. In 1927 he aspired to "£1000 a year [and] a Spanish mistress", and in 1930 marriage to the American Jean Bakewell brought the £1000 a year, enough for a life of idleness in the south of France. The importance of knowing the right social and literary figures remained, and any rejection was distressing. When the Connollys dropped in on the Huxleys to be told "Aldous is working", and when they felt snubbed by the Huxleys' conversation, he was greatly upset noted in the Journal: "The Huxleys have added ten years to my life." Earlier, in pre-Hitler Berlin, Herold Nicolson was kind, and kindness was always cheering. As a young man Connolly was looking for father-figures (his dislike of his own father was strong), and Nicolson briefly served as one. This need feded after marriage to Jean.

What perhaps did not fade was an uneasy belief in his own ugliness, so that he was in constant need of reassurance from women about the untruth of such remarks as Virginia Woolf's that "the ape is considerably more handsome than you".

The link with Jean was the fact that the first and probably his best years of his marriage had been spent in France. The effect of all those quotations from Pascal, Chamois, Sainte-Beuve and others is to make him seem slightly like Huxley's Mr Mercator, that writer of delicious little middles for the weeklies, of whom the unkind said that wherever he was it was Paris. What the little book shows most clearly, however (in spite of such back-handed and confused praise as that of Stephen Spender, who said the book showed somebody who could not realize his vision, but had "the vision of the vision" he has not had), is the essentially mimetic nature of Cyril Connolly's talent. He could do you an excellent Huxley and a very reasonable Bond, sketch a lively comic picture of a totalitarian world (comic? why yes, what else?) in "Year Nine", elaborate brilliant fantasies to conversation, with just the touch of seriousness that saved

him from obscurity. Faced with the need and desire to record his own unglorious life in a world where mimetic would not work, he led to take refuge in Plutarch's helmsman in listing "temporaries" for his anger, and in rock-profundities like "He who would write a book that would last for ever must learn to use invisible ink." Other would-be aphorisms seem to have strayed from Noel Coward, or even from an agony aunt's column: "There are two great moments in a woman's life: when first she finds herself to be deeply in love with her man and when she leaves him." The exploration of the self was the only subject about which he could have been serious as a writer, but in the end he flinched from it here.

"That odd intelligent forerunner Cyril Connolly" the phrase was used by Geoffrey Grigson in the 1920s, and it does not seem unjust. His relationship with Jean Quennell, friend and literary rival from Oxford days, shows in the Journal as alternating between admiration of Quennell's industry, and a slightly patronizing tolerance of one who worked in the market-place: "A copywriter in the carnal part. Yet still a proud Augustan in his heart." Yet as the years passed he must have been aware that the industry had produced far more of worth than his own life of deliberate hedonism – and negligent ease. David Pryce-Jones puts it very well: "All along, he laid claims to the respect of Quennell, a friend and literary rival from Oxford days, shows in the Journal as alternating between admiration of Quennell's industry, and a slightly patronizing tolerance of one who worked in the market-place: "A copywriter in the carnal part. Yet still a proud Augustan in his heart." 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## The returns of the writer

Richard Findlater

MICHELLE VESSILLIER-RESSI

Le Météor d'auteur: Comment

vivent-ils?

399pp. Paris: Dunod. 95fr.

2 04 015480 9

The author of this survey of the economics of professional authorship in France is a woman with unusually varied qualifications. Not only is she a professional economist who has worked for the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique since 1966 and a specialist in cultural economics, but she has written four novels (one was awarded the Prix du Quai des Orfèvres), scripts for TV films, a score of songs on record and a play whose production is said to be imminent. Her personal acquaintance with the pressures of increasing pluralism in a "revolutionized" cultural market has, no doubt, been an asset in an inquiry which embraces not only writers for print—the "pure" *écrivain* is, she says, almost extinct—but also authors of films, libretti, plays, songs, TV and radio programmes.

This umbrella category of authorship is so wide, specific information about book-writers is so narrow and the organization of writers' earnings is so different in France and Britain that it is hard to make valid comparisons of conditions between the two countries. Michelle Vessillier-Ressi herself rarely acknowledges British experience, although she occasionally cites American parallels and contrasts. As yet no comparable range of statistical sources is available here, and no research on so far-reaching, ambitious and detailed a scale has been published in Britain. But her book is stuffed with many facts, ideas and arguments which, in spite of their virtually inevitable confusion, help to make it essential reading for anyone examining the present, problems and future prospects of professional writers on this side of the Channel as well, not

least because it illustrates many of the pitfalls and pitfalls ahead.

In exploring the misty margins of history, jurisprudence, sociology, law, economics and politics, and scraping together mountains of factual data, Mlle Vessillier-Ressi eventually has to tackle the problem of quantifying the objects of her quest. The first obvious source is the membership of the three main authors' societies. These are the Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques, which was established in 1791—the first of its kind in the world—and now includes writers for radio and television as well as the theatre; the Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Éditeurs de Musique; and the Société des Gens de Lettres. Their total membership is nearly 75,000; but the figure seems fishy—many writers belong to more than one society, and many stopped writing long ago. A better clue is the number of accounts controlled by the societies, which collect the revenues from their members' rights. After deducting from this total the number of publishers, dead authors' estates and authors living abroad, Mlle Vessillier-Ressi arrives at a maximum of some 15,000; but this excludes writers for print and the cinema—book publishers have long claimed the exploitation of all subsidiary rights (with 50 per cent of the proceeds), and over 90 per cent of the accounts controlled by the SGDL are for TV and radio earnings.

How many book-writers are there in France? A few years ago the Minister of Culture and the French equivalent of the Publishers' Association gave the figure of 40,000, for every possible kind of author. According to the Centre National des Lettres fewer than 10,000 publish books regularly (1500 of them a year do it themselves). Most of these, Mlle Vessillier-Ressi has decided, are amateurs: from the records of AGESSA, the organization handling social security for authors, she has discovered that in 1980 there were some 2,150 registered authors earning up to 36,000 francs (of whom 1,000 were book-writers). So she puts

the maximum number of professional authors at 3,000.

Persisting in her attempt to identify the members of this tiny minority, she sent a detailed questionnaire to 2,786 whose names she obtained from a pension fund (improbably, the Caisse Allocations Vieillesse des Professeurs de la Musique). She used 857 of their responses, and has combined these with about 1,000 entries in *Who's Who in France* to create a somewhat bewildering but instructive *Identikit* portrait of the French author. He is a man of about fifty who is far more likely than the "average" Frenchman to be a bachelor, divorced or childless. He lives in Paris, because it is impossible for his job to work anywhere else. (Nearly 40 per cent of Mlle Vessillier-Ressi's sample were born in the Paris area, and some 80 per cent live there.) His family and educational background is relatively privileged. (Nearly half the sampled authors' fathers came from the liberal professions and upper grades of society.) But among all this detail by far the most important fact is that he cannot live on authorship alone.

Confirmation of the poverty of authors' rewards may be seen in the societies' figures for 1980. Of SAGD accounts for theatre earnings, nearly 75 per cent were less than 5,000 francs, and only 4 per cent were more than 50,000 francs. Radio and TV earnings were higher: but more than half the accounts were for less than 5,000 francs, and fewer than 8 per cent for more than 50,000 francs.

"There is scarcely any *homo economicus* less informed and rational than the professional author," Mlle Vessillier-Ressi contends. And of all writers, she says sixty pages later, it is the book-author who has the smallest sense of economic realities, lacking as he does those educative experiences of confrontation with film producers, actors and television executives which other writers benefit. However arguable, that assessment of the *écrivain's* insulation from life may be, there seems to be no question that in

France it is book-publishing which gives most authors the worst treatment. In any attempt to challenge the publishers' stranglehold over their rights, authors lack the help of literary agents, whose "bad reputation" in France is left unexplained by Mlle Vessillier-Ressi. At least two-thirds of them are published by three main groups of publisher-distributors, for whom their professional association, the SGDL, is no match. Unlike SAGD and SACEM, it cannot afford to give its members supplementary pensions. It lacks not only money but power. Yet, according to *Le Météor d'auteur*, it seems impossible to set up new associations for the authors most in need: those who write for publishers and film-makers. There are up to 5,000 bookshops which live by literature, and, declares Mlle Vessillier-Ressi, make it live by making it known and loved; but very few writers—far fewer than in Britain, one suspects—live by their books and not many of these books may be accurately ranked as literature.

In looking at improvements in the author's lot in recent years—including the increase in state aid and the bank to

the social security system—Mlle Vessillier-Ressi recognizes the need for special protection because of the dangers of mass-market culture. But she also shrewdly deflates the rhetoric of Marxist simplifications when applied to the complex realities of contemporary society where everyone is both producer and consumer of culture. West as well as the East, maintaining that economic and financial risk is, in things considered, the essence of an author's métier.

Ultimately optimistic, Mlle Vessillier-Ressi puts her faith in the corrective mechanisms of capitalism, its economic and cultural costs can be minimized by using the market to finance a new "politique de la création". Meanwhile, no doubt, the second métier will continue to be the pillar of French publishing, and the literary profession will continue to be, as Jules Renard said, "le seul où l'on puisse sans ridicule ne pas gagner d'argent".

## Reading for a reward

P. J. Kavanagh

BAMBER GASCOIGNE

Quest for the Golden Hare: With the perfect solution submitted by Mike Barker and John Rousseau

224pp. Cape. £7.95.

0 224 0216 8

Quest for the Golden Hare: With the perfect solution submitted by Mike Barker and John Rousseau. 224pp. Cape. £7.95. 0 224 0216 8. More distastefully, he gives long quotations from the lives and letters of madmen and madwomen. One William Williams more than fifty letters to look at two things at the same time, as well as by his inability to spell. Gascoigne calls himself a dedicated non-doer of puzzles and his search explanations of this one do him the more credit.

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LUCIEN FEBVRE

The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais

Translated by Beatrice Gottlieb

516pp. Harvard University Press. £28.

0 674 0825 3

MARC BLOCH

Les Rois thaumaturges

542pp. Paris: Gallimard. 120fr.

2 07 022704 9

DOMINIC LACAPRA and STEVEN L. KAPLAN (Editors)

Modern European Intellectual History: Responses and New Perspectives

317pp. Cornell University Press.

£23.50 (paperback, £12).

0 8014 1470 9

Forty years after its original publication, Lucien Febvre's most important book has at last been translated into English. His junior partner Marc Bloch is much better known in the English-speaking world. Bloch's *Les Rois thaumaturges*, just reissued as *Royal Touch* in 1973, his English as *Royal Touch* in 1973, his

Widening out still further, Febvre goes on to discuss the apparently blasphemous jokes which Rabelais makes in *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*, and which Lefranc stressed so much in his arguments for the "rationalism" of those books. Febvre points out that these passages—the "resurrection" of Epistemon, for example—belong to a medieval tradition of parody in which the clergy themselves indulged. According to him, Rabelais was a good Christian of an Erasmus type, a critic of many of the outward forms of the late medieval Church, but a believer in interior religion.

At this point one might have expected the book to come to an end, since the religious credentials of Rabelais had been verified and Lefranc's argument refuted. What Febvre does, however, is to widen out still further, discussing the limits of unbelief in the sixteenth century. Leaving Rabelais far behind, he now tackles the problem of the possibility of atheism in the sixteenth century, and this brings us back to the history of mentalities as it has been discussed by Marc Bloch in his *Royal Touch*. Febvre argues that the sixteenth century was not intellectually ready for unbelief because of the nature of what he calls the *outillage mental* of the period, its "mental tools", as Beatrice Gottlieb renders it, its intellectual equipment, its conceptual apparatus.

Febvre liked to say that there was no such thing as diplomatic history or the history of philosophy. "Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as economic and social history," there is only history, total history, with compartments. Febvre and Bloch, he argued, were not only historians but also linguists, sociologists and psychologists, for a better understanding of the past. This is the context for the history of "collective mentalities" as Bloch and Febvre both practised it. Bloch chose to write the history of the belief in the "king's evil". The problem which served as his point of departure was that of accounting for this "collective error", as he called it, of answering the question why people continued to believe in the healing power of the king, although the expected cures must have failed to take place. His answer was that the belief was self-confirming. If the sufferer got better, the king got the credit. If the cure failed to take place, the sufferer went back to try again in the language of Sir Karl Popper, which is not far distant from the thought of Marc Bloch, belief in the royal touch was not falsifiable. It was an accepted belief in any case, but associated with a more general faith in "miracles". It formed, part of a "primitive" mentality.

Febvre's point of departure was rather different from Bloch's, but he arrived at similar conclusions. He was aimed across the suggestion, in Abel Lefranc's edition of *Pantagruel*, that Rabelais was an unbeliever who wrote in order to undermine Christianity. Febvre was convinced that this interpretation was not only mistaken so far as Rabelais was concerned but also anachronistic, attributing thoughts to the author of *Pantagruel* which were quite unthinkable in the period. This is the reason for the book's rather curious structure, a kind of inverted pyramid. Febvre's study begins in an extremely precise, philological way. According to Lefranc, the atheism of Rabelais was denounced by a number of his contemporaries, so Febvre goes through these contemporaries, for the most part minor neo-Latin poets of the 1550s, to show, for example, that the verses "On a certain irreligious follower of Lucien" do not refer to Rabelais but to someone quite different, and more generally, that the "atheist" did not have its modern precise meaning. It was a smear-word, used in whatever sense one wanted to give it.

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## Cracking the codes

Mary Warnock

HOWARD DAVIS and PAUL WALTON (Editors)

Language, Image, Media

326pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £19.50

(paperback, £7.50).

0 631 12704 6

Howard Davis and Paul Walton worked together in the 1970s on the Glasgow Media Group's *Bad News* and *More Bad News*. They were concerned with "decoding" the message of TV on industrial affairs. In order to expose what they held to be a marked bias against the trades unions. They have applied the same techniques, in the first essay of the present collection, to the international coverage of Aldo Moro's murder by the Italian Red Brigades in 1978. This time they expose a massive bias in favour of democratic and anti-leftist propaganda. The second essay, by John Frow, is a study of the Italian language. It is a study of the way in which the language of the media is used to create a false picture of the world. The third essay, by John Frow, is a study of the way in which the language of the media is used to create a false picture of the world. The fourth essay, by John Frow, is a study of the way in which the language of the media is used to create a false picture of the world. 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## Cheery but eerie

**Peter Kemp**

**STEPHEN BENATAR**  
**When I Was Otherwise**  
 270pp. Bodley Head. £7.95.  
 0 370 30531 0

Stephen Benatar's *When I Was* is a lively novel that begins with the discovery of two corpses. In the first chapter reports the coming to light of a macabre ménage in Hendon — where a home help, on gaining entry to a slum-like semi, finds one old woman newly dead, and the remains of another who died a year or so earlier. The surviving member of the household, an elderly widower, refuses to offer any explanation. For the rest of the novel, moving backwards in time, the detective — Stephen Benatar does this for him, retracing the devious ways that have led to this grisly juncture.

Skilfully following the wandering thought-processes of the aged - the way their minds can abruptly stumble into the past - he uncovers what lies behind the increasingly shaky co-existence of a brother, sister and sister-in-law in their suburban home. Shangri-La. After briefly describing the final years of the three old people, the novel moves back to plump out their personalities and pasts. The most substantially fleshed out is the one who ends as a skeleton in a bedroom dominated by Daisy, robustly bursting with egotism and appetite for life. Her exuberant playfulness and levity are contrasted with the staidly attentive Benard, who shows how the atrocious and the admirable are wedged inseparably together in the character behind his theatrically idyllic facade.

her. Dan and Marsha, Daisy's in-laws, are less powerful personalities. Dan, a fact, though the survivor, never really comes to life, remaining a dummy-like model of decency. Beatstar — as an earlier novel, *With Her Safe At Home* is displayed, — is an author who is markedly more interested in portraying women than men. A Marsha, ultimately goaded out of her playfulness into creepy attack, offers a sharp instance of something that clearly fascinates him: latent femine ferocity. Like Rachel, the central figure in *Beatstar*, Marsha is a woman who, for decided reasons of intimacy, as with Rachel, too, starved needs eventually impel her into feverish self-assertion. In case in case, Beatstar is particularly concerned

to show how sentimentality can scorch the psyche into psychosis. Middle-brow romances, manifestations of cloying romanticism, are high among his fictional preoccupations. Chat about escape books and films, snatches of mawkish songs echo cheerily and eerily through his novels. Always in her element

unprepared. With his "compact powerful torch, a flask of bot tea," "field-glasses of a remarkable resolution purchased in Dortmund" he is not, whatever he likes to pretend, an innocent observer. He is deeply involved in the awful affair; whatever is, complicit in a grim, unacknowledged pact with the one who has the cunning, or the moral

courage, of the sheer delusion  
compulsion to invoke the apocalyptic  
They are in it together, like tortoise  
and victim, charlatan and dupe. He  
after it is all over, the survivor shows  
around the crater, limping slightly,  
speaking in tones of self-reproach  
"God knows why we do these things  
ourselves." But God, as is the blas-  
phemous "settling the world," may be  
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is interested in. Our revelations are  
rearmillions are our responsibility.

Harrison's Imagination is merciless. His fiction is a scalpel slicing through the skin of the world to make dissections both strange and disturbingly familiar. This collection puts him in the company of McEwan and Peter Carey, but he is grittier than Carey, and wittier than McEwan. His style, as ever, is his own.

[illegible]

## On the track

something which these anxious characters would seize upon, and pie down: an elusive conclusion, a fatal epiphany, a spirit of disembodied violence waiting for its incalling. In Egnarro's depressed second-hand bookseller is haunted by the prospect of a secret country, its existence deduced from certain typographical errors and half-hearted conversations. The Egnarro is the undiscovered land, the tropical Eden of popular romance. There at last will be the answer, to which the everyday world provides such a fragmentary and disappointing litter of clues. Meanwhile among these clues—the fossil footprints, the urban detritus—tread successive uncertain narrators, all looking apprehensively about them.

unprepared. With his "compact but powerful torch, a flask of hot tea," and "field-glasses of a remarkable resolution purchased in Dordmund" he is not, whatever he likes to pretend on innocent observers. He is deeply involved in the awful affair; whatever it is, complete in a grim but unacknowledged pact with the one who has the cunning, or the moral courage, or the sheer demonic compulsion to invoke the apocalypse. They are all together, like torturers and victim, charlatan and dupe. Here, after the war, the survivor shows us around the crater, limping slightly, and speaking in tones of self-reproach: "God knows why we do these things to ourselves." But God, as is the blazored and sly "Settling the World," may be a giant beetle from the dark side of the Moon. God only knows what He's interested in. Our revelations and our reprimandations are our own responsibility.

Harrison's imagination is merciless. His fiction is a scalpel slicing through the skin of the world to make dissections both strange and disturbingly familiar. This collection puts him in the company of Ian McEwan and Peter Carey; but he is grittier than Carey, and wittier than McEwan. His style, as ever, is his own.

[illegible]

**Istroll round Washington: November strewn red welcomes on the pavements from the trees on Constitution and Independence Avenues as if the least pedestrian were VIPs or returning warriors lured inside to back their lifeblood gushing out this hue of Fall bulldozed by Buick and by Cadillac to slide drain too choked up to take it all.**

**Through two museums, *Science* and *Indian Arts* something from doop deep below the car-choked street, like thousands of Poe's buried tell-tale hearts pounds with a base and undissembled beat.**

The American Wrecking Co.'s repeatedly rammed iron wrecking ball swinging in arcs of rhythmic to and fro against a scarcely 50-year-old, well-built wall cracks cement from cross-cross steel supports, and, floor by floor, once guaranteed to last till timon needs more museums, Justice Courts, and enterprises space, collapses to the past.

A red light flashes many times a minute on the Population Clock here in D.C. to show the billions the World has left including those police, that black youth, me, and, three years ago today, reached 4.5! Each line of verse how many people born? How many of these children will survive crushed through the narrow and of PLENTY's horn!

And on red light for punished end for plied the FBI displays next to the time flashes on whenever there's committed somewhere in the States a serious crime, as I imagine that it flashed on when the youth I see handcuffed and then screamed away to monuments of justice, Order, Truth, committed his, but what it was I couldn't say.

An All Souls' pumpkin rots on someone's porch. It could be PLENTY's head, about to die, her cornucopia guttering torch still hot enough to scorch the whole Earth dry. This pumpkin lantern's gouged eyes glued against some unbelievably bright glare can't see, as I do, that young black pursued then caught, the red lights backing darkening sky.

Leaves, some like manes, some volcanic chuffs, whirl on successive wafts of hot CO as Constitution and Independence Avenues boom to the ball and chain's destructive blow and, against Virginia, on Capital and Law each sunset-reddened wind o' our degree of vast thermometers that, floor by floor, chart our fever into World War Three.

In a poem this long how many oew souls born?  
How many peodulum swings of wreckers' hall  
that throbs beneath the White House oo whose fawn  
a glauit vacuum's Hoover jog the Fall?

One feels that Soueif is conscious of the Egyptian and/or Arab literary tradition. A specific foreboding is nicely introduced into the stories by the occasional literal rendering of Arabic idioms: "What bent luck!", and one character exclaims; "Nobody fills her eye" (pleases or delights her), says another; rectifying the opening chapter of the Qur'an from memory. Also he said to "read" it (the stronger sense of the verb *qara'a* oddly displacing the weaker, "to read" the stories, "The Wedding of Zeina" and "The Success in its title that of the Sudanese writer Tayeb Salhi's novella *The Wedding of Zeina*. In it Dada Zeina, Aisha's nanny, tells of how she was married after complete depilation (only the hair on her head is left). Zeina is delivered to her bridegroom for a taste of her virginity. He thrusts his bandaged middle finger into her "working" blood and round and round she finally "dances" it, "with a faculty, bloodstained." "We uncured wound [the bandage] round his head, blood and all, and danced slowly and proudly into the crowd, using his leg like a cane to dance with and call out, 'Our Honour, Our daughter, Our Honour, Our daughter, Our Honour, Our family's Honour'."

In "Her Man", a sequel to "The Wedding to Zeina", Zeina, now a widow — a first wife — of ten years standing finds a way to get rid of her husband's second, much younger wife. Once again the story has a peculiar Egyptian quality: strong surface emotions expressed in almost ritual language, even in the inner monologues of the characters; great seriousness; and maintenance of complete silence about the subtler, darker reaches of the mind.

The two stories that are cited wholly or partly about Aishé England — "1964" and "Knowing" — rather different, however, "1964" particular — in which Aishé attends south London comprehensive in year after the Beatles' first LP — illuminated by a wit and dexterity of expression that place it in marked contrast with the other stories, a lead one to think that the Arab Egyptian literary manner to some extent imposes itself with the Egypt subject matter; and that Soueef's commitment to it is at present at least partly involuntary, however conscious it may also be. This in turn prompts further thought: that although the strongest stories in this collection are fact those of a modern Arab Egyptian manner, and these rank with the best of their kind — an *Abdab* Soueef particular gift may attain its full expression when she succeeds in combining the style that her English experience effects with the peculiar Arab or Egyptian literary style, which she is already so accomplished a practitioner.

something which these ancient characters would seize upon, and lay down: an elusive conclusion, a false epiphany, a spirit of disembodied violence waiting for its incalling. Egmaro's a depressed second-hand bookseller is haunted by the prospect of a secret country, its existence deduced from certain typographical errors and half-heard conversations. Egmaro is the undiscovered land, the tropical Eden of popular romance. There at last will be the answer, which the everyday world provides such a fragmentary and dispiriting litter of clues. Meanwhile among the clues—the fossil footprints, the urban detritus—tread successive uncertain narrators, all looking apprehensively about them.

Everywhere, meaning threatens broken pendant, a little silver monk is the talisman of an exhausted marriage. A handicapped couple, blind, one paraplegic, form a composite organism with its desperate vitality. A deserted building site in Bow opens out "the floor plan of the slums to come." As the macabre Alexandre explains, "Matter is chaotic in the universe. It is disorganized, it yearns to be of use." The revelation may be sordid or it may be beautiful; it will not catch the narrator unaware.

the rose-tinted realm they represent. Marshu slowly withdraws through make-believe into total delusion. Graduating from the sickly to the sickening, it is she who turns Shungri-La, with its increasingly ironic-seeming name, into a kind of cosy chumel-house, barricaded against reality and the rest of the world.

As with *Wish Her Safe At Home* When I Was Otherwise depicts a dream-home turning into a nightmare within which a woman is crazily trapped. And similarities between these books are so very close as to suggest that Benet's imagination may also be in danger of becoming housebound, obsessively limited to the same fictional territory. Both novels are set in a remote, isolated village or newspaper. Both contain women whose life has been seriously impaired by the behaviour of a selfish mother. Both watch someone teetering through disorientated domesticity into dementia. In each, a reclusive woman locks herself in a mouldering house with a decaying corpse. In each a personality is doubly rotted by sugar and sentimentality and soured by frustration. Both books conclude with Graceland Guignol, writer of horror and hallucination.

Paradoxically, however, despite Benatar's enthusiasm for covering the same ground, the scenes where he does

## A feminist issue

Enter the fairy godmother in the form of Don the homosexual, who works in the Department Store where she has wangled herself a job as a copywriter. Don takes April in hand is the true hero of the book. "Imagine a thin little thing stepping out of you. Oh, I can't bear it. Be still my heart. You'd be gorgeous." Soon he's got her exercising on the rool, watching her diet, reporting progress.

**CONAUUELO BAEHR**  
Nothing to Lose  
218pp. Gollancz. £8  
0 575 03293 6

"Pining away and dying" was probably not anorexia nervosa, but there has never been a romantic term for fitness. The unambiguous word "gym" can be called a euphemism for fat, or even there, the euphemism "bulimia" — almost as trendy an expression as dyslexia or AIDS — is used in the first half of the book to describe the eating habits of the women in the developing countries. Of the seven deadly sins, Greed is surely the most comical and the lowest, except perhaps for Envy, to which it is often akin. But this is the 1980s and America, and the assumption is that Consuelo Beech's first heroine, April, guzzles so much because her parents don't love her. She can hardly be expected, to find solace in Nature or the quality of life in New York City.

The most interesting aspect of this entertaining if somewhat fraudulent novel is the description of April's terror of becoming involved with other people and of the inevitable pain. Her first marriage reaches a shattering climax when she is thunderously told her husband is flirting in the next room: "She was sure Harald had heard it. They probably heard it in the next apartment. They probably heard it across the river in Hoboken." Thrown out by her husband, she quakes inwardly for hours, then goes to the beach and swims alone with a gargantuan sandwich. One scene achieves a genuinely dream-like quality: April is drifting about the shops in a shabby raincoat, wearing sneakers without socks, and it is picked up by a man who takes her to a restaurant, the only one in the world, who takes her to bed, and gazes at her gigantic thighs in delight.

**THE INTELLIGENCE WHO**  
**1988**

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the world'

Enter the fairy godmother in the form of Don the homosexual who works in the Department Store where she has wangled herself a job as a copywriter. Don takes April in hand as the true hero of the book. "Imagine a thin little thing stepping out of you. Oh, I can't bear it. Be still my heart. You'd be gorgeous." Soon he's got her exercising on the roof, watching her diet, reporting progress.

'Now tell me', he said, 'when you relax your forehead, ayevids and mouth, how do you feel about yourself?'

'Satisfied.'

'Precisely, you're satisfied which translates into exciting.'

By now we're in Gurley-girly country and the stage for self-improvement; it's basic Mills, even Boon. Mr. Right comes along, stern, unapproachable, the President of the Company, shortly to be available.

It is all very post-feminist, with a joke or two about feminism along the way. Playing hard to get. April changes jobs and works happily with a bluff, bottom-pat. "You ever hear of sexual harassment, buddy?" she'd asked in a menacing yelp. "You want sexual harassment," he would throw her oratorical words back at her. "Sexual harassment." She liked him and he liked her.

In spite of the romantic life at the centre of the book and the tedious descriptions of clothes and objects that read like a hymn to the golden calf, *Nothing to Lose* is fun to read. Pert, witty and very New York; full of the admirable offhand observations of an unfooled eye.

**Writers at Work: Fifth Series** (387pp: Penguin, £2.95. 0 14 008618 4) contains interviews from *The Paris Review* with Kingsley Amis, John Cheever, Henry Green, P. G. Wodehouse and others.

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## commentary

## Not the riglar drama

H. R. Woudhuysen

PHILIP MASSINGER

A New Way to Pay Old Debts  
The Other Place, Sturford-upon-Avon

"A silly play. The plot but ordinary... for the lines they are very poor, no expressions, but only plaine downright relating the matter; without any new dress either of language or fancy": Abraham Wright's judgment of *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (he read no further than Act 3), but despite its comparative popularity Massinger's play is not immediately attractive. It offers one really outstanding part, that of Sir Giles Overreach, which Edmund Kean played, according to Byron and Hazlitt, with quite astonishing power and brilliance. For the rest we are in a world of cardboard prodigals, righteous widows, pompous lords, romantic lovers, and a host of unlikely lawyers, JPs, cooks, innkeepers and servants. The play comes to life only in the long last act, when Sir Giles is himself overreached and driven into a terrifying and passionate frenzy.

Adrian Noble's straightforward production at The Other Place betrays a certain lack of confidence in the play and his own ideas about it. While his set is a dusty grey the characters and their costumes are either black or white. The main exception to this is the seedy-looking and unlovable Lord Lovell of Lewis Jones, who is dressed in a rich grey suit complete with broad-brimmed hat, moustache and pearl ear-ring. He appears to come out of the Royalist side of the English Civil War—"1642" is chalked in huge figures on the floor of the stage. But Overreach belongs to the late eighteenth century, and the contrast between Lovell's rural, aristocratic values and his bourgeois, metropolitan ones is lost in this clash of periods.

Equally, what we are meant to make of the characters never quite emerges: are we to take Welborne as an unfortunate gentleman fallen on hard times, or a reprehensible rake who has needed the services of a surgeon? Can we really believe in Lovell's marrying the beautiful widow Lady Alworth? Is Greedy (played engagingly by a feebly thin John Carter), to be condemned as a dreadful glutton or admired for his obsession with food and eating as the spirit of festive comedy? Most puzzlingly of all, while Overreach is clearly a despicable villain why is it so difficult to hate him? In spite of some confident and accomplished performances the production remains

uncertain of and uneasy about its own direction.

At times it seems that Emrys James's Overreach has been conceived of as another attempt to portray Edmund Kean and tie down the impossibilities and contradictions of the great romantic actor in one of his most successful roles. While in a fine performance James does his best to convey this, most of the production's impetus appears to come from a different source and to draw on the spirit and formula of the RSC's version of *Nicholas Nickleby*. Colin Sell's lively and highly visible band helps make up for the "very poor" language of the play, and a constant jociness and frenetic energy disguise the plot's wooden structure. It begins with a bang as Welborne is thrown out of his Nottinghamshire inn by the Squeers-like Tapwell of Timothy Kightley and his ghastly Fanny Squeers of a wife, Froth. Throughout the evening amid lewd fights, crazy chases and wild acrobatics parallels keep emerging with Dickens's novel: principally of Overreach as Ralph Nickleby trying to marry off his bejewelled and rouged, but innocent, daughter to gain power and money; but also of Overreach as Ralph robbing his nephew Welborne of his rightful inheritance. The cruel extortioner is aided by an unredeemed Newman Noggs called Marrall - a sinister and treacherous clerk who cheats his master, but is also then rejected as a rascal by the virtuous at the play's end.

A *New Way to Pay Old Debts*, so popular in the 1820s and 1830s, might have been exactly the right sort of play (suitably altered and retouched) for Vincent Crummies and his company. While in the middle of writing *Nicholas Nickleby* Dickens seems deliberately to have avoided going to see the play, partly perhaps because of his dislike of the younger Kean's rivalry with his friend Macready. "I meant to have gone to the theatre to night," he wrote to his wife on March 5, 1839, "but I thought better of it when I found Charles Kean was doing Sir Giles Overreach and so stopped by the fireside, reading a book of celebrated trials for High Treason which I bought to-day." At the same time he told John Forster: "If it had been the 'riglar' drama I should have gone, but I was afraid Sir Giles Overreach (are there two of 's') might upset me so I stayed away."

It is tempting to speculate that Dickens's tenderness about going to see Massinger's play may have been related to a recognition of its closeness in parts to the novel he had in hand. Adrian Noble's production suggests some striking possible parallels between the two works - it is a pity he did not make more of them.

## Author, Author

Competition No 130  
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than July 29. A prize of £10 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or failing that, the most correct.

1. "I sat upon the convex mound Of one vast kidney, Jonah prays And sings his canticles and hymns, Making the hollow vault resound God's goodness and mysterious ways Till the great fish spouts music as he swims."

James Joyce, *Ulysses*.

2. "My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin..."

T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock".

3. "I am a gentleman in a duetcoat trying to make you hear. Your ears are soft and small..."

John Galsworthy, "Plaza Piece".

## Desperate Dan and the school friend

J. S. Bratton

Penny Dreadfuls and Comics:  
English periodicals for children from Victorian times to the present day.  
Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood

One of the joys of modern museums is that they legitimize the fascination of the trivial, providing an excuse to take seriously things of which one's parents and teachers disapproved. We may gawp unimpressed at medieval torture-chambers and Victorian underwear, and approach thrillingly close to the superannated steam-trains. The Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood is a very good place to find such pleasures, and their current loan exhibition of English periodicals for children is a treat as good as a whole bag of bubble-gum for the unregenerate urchin in us.

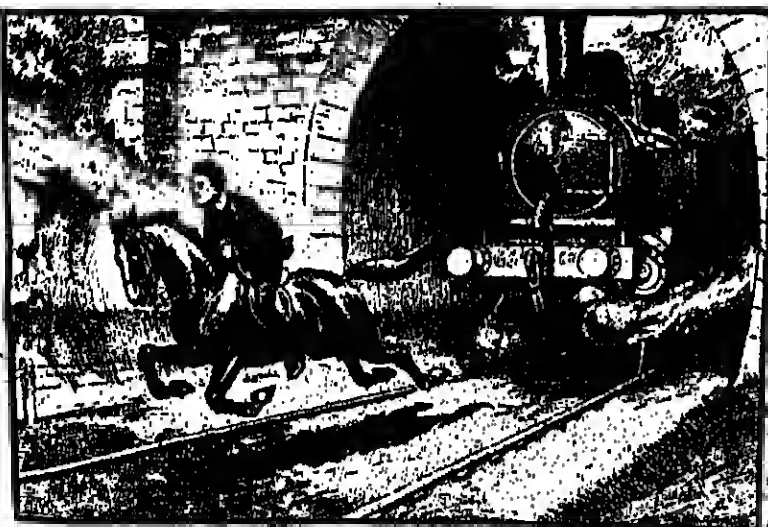
The most remarkable feature of the exhibition is the wealth of the cheapest and most ephemeral publications which is on show. Such material survives its readers, and these periodicals are important to the student of modern culture, for over a period of 150 years they are the only stories and images that we can be sure

were absorbed by a large section of readers, the newly and the barely literate. Assessment of the imaginative impact of the nineteenth-century boom in literacy is greatly hampered by the fact that books were bought for, rather than by, the child reader; only the comics, initially costing a penny or less and regularly shared by nine or ten readers, are direct evidence about their own choice of fiction. The physical appearance of the early periodicals in this exhibition underlines the essential difference between the bloods and comics, presented in single numbers or cheap cardboard covers, and the wholesome periodicals which were set up to rival them, all on display in handsome cloth-bound annuals, obviously designed as avuncular gifts, or even school rewards.

The impression one gains from the succession of luridly-coloured fronts on show is complex. There are links with other popular images, not only since *Radio Fun* and TV spin-offs, but among the earliest examples: one of the first cases juxtaposes a big poster for a story-paper showing a boy sailor carrying a gun with a set of out-of-date theatrical prints given away with a *Boy of England* penny-part novel in 1877; the boy hero is striking the same pose as the heroic figures played by T. P. Cooke and Gomerall fifty years before. But as well as such links across

the popular tradition, there is a discernible thread of continuity in the papers themselves. They are on the one hand violent, deliberately "shocking", polarizing good and evil according to crude stereotypes; and on the other fantastical and imaginative, rejecting rational restrictions. The same simian face belongs to Sweeney Todd in 1878 and war-comic Nazis a hundred years later; the fantasy of limitless machine power fuels electrical birds and steam houses in 1890s dime novels and innumerable spacehips and bike mags today; and of course in the comics Desperate Dan and Dennis the Menace act out ritual fantasies of violence.

In so rich a field there are inevitably omissions, even in a large exhibition: nevertheless, two criticisms seem to me justified. There is no coherent display of girls' papers. The Billy Bunter case contains a couple of pre-war issues of *School Friend* and one of *Girl's Cinema*, unexplained, there chiefly because they were also published by Amalgamated Press. The one case devoted to girls' comics confusingly seems to suggest that *School Friend* was first published in 1950, and offers very meagre selection of the *Rosy*, *Romeo* and *Valentine* that passed under the desks in my school; no copy of *Girl's Crystal*, from the previous generation, nor *Red Letter* or *Red Star*. One is reminded of the accusation of Angelo McRobbie that cultural studies are often a way for male sociologists to participate covertly in subcultural homages to masculinity. This bias does not devalue what is here; but a failure of labelling does blur the impact of one of the most interesting sections, the history of the "comic" paper. All the labelling is deliberately sparing, and the penny dreadful and story-paper cases the material does speak for itself, but when we reach *St. Sapper* and *Comic Cuts* it should be made clear that we are now looking at material not initially intended for children, which extended its readership down the age-range. In fact many of these papers, from *Jack Harkaway* to *The Bells*, belong to a subcultural set not definable by age. Its typical representative is thought of as a young adolescent, and much of the material here seems to represent the typology of male pubescent fantasy. It should not be forgotten, however, that the reader of these periodicals of this kind is nevertheless more often a girl than a boy, and quite likely to be an adult, who reads like else. Despite these reservations, the exhibition is decidedly to be relished.



"A white glimmer showed ahead; a cold light gleamed white upon the dripping side of the tunnel. A moment later the astonished signman in the box at the mouth of the tunnel saw the horse and rider dash forth from the black entry, with the locomotive of the oncoming train literally at their heels." An illustration to the serial Paddy Leary's Schoolboys by T. C. Bridges in the *Boys' Realm*, 1903, from the exhibition reviewed here.

## Unspontaneous combustion

Ronald Hayman

THOMAS BABE  
Buried Inside Extra  
Royal Court Theatre

Watching an all-American cast in the theatre is quite different from watching one in a film, and though *Buried Inside Extra* is an extremely flawed play, it is a very good one.

What makes matters worse is that the play seems to be mainly about the differing reactions of these characters to a double crisis. The newspaper on which they work is closing down with the issue now in the press, but the city editor has omitted to give the staff a week's notice; "I wanted everybody to have fun, like me, to the bitter last." If nobody seems to mind much, this is not because of the other crisis. They are warned that a nuclear device is ticking away somewhere inside the building. Determined not to let reactions sink into melodramatic cliché, Babe makes his characters carry on for most of the time as if everything were normal, though occasionally they lapse into hysteria. A loud rumble makes the city editor sit huddled in a corner bawling hands with the young reporter who is his rival. But the noise is caused by a fly-wheel that has come loose and rolled along the floor of the press room.

By 14.30, the hard-boiled Liz, who edits the women's page, has

seem mechanical. The characters Babe is trying to depict are clever, temperamental, articulate and mercurial, while the actors - especially Dixie Carter, Vincent Gardenia and Sandy Dennis - give the impression of being so deeply in tune with their roles that they could improvise the mood-changes. What they cannot do is give the impression of spontaneity inside the strait-jacket of a script which so laboriously mimicks spontaneity.

Such tension as the play has depends mainly on revelations about personal relationships in the past and present. The best sequence is the one in which Bowsky's wife, appearing unexpectedly in the office, has her first meeting with the woman who has been sleeping with her husband for twenty years. "I only know you," she says, "from your bylines in the paper and also because Jake has been known to call your name out loud in the depths of his sleep." Like most of the other gaps in the play, this is good enough to make a laugh, but not good enough to make theatrical rhetoric sound like spontaneous conversation.

Philip Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* is available as an RSC Playtext (67pp, Methuen, £1.95, 0 413 533107); Thomas Babe's *Buried Inside Extra* has been published in the Royal Court Writers series (30pp, Methuen, £1.95, 0 413 541207). Both are parts of a special series produced by Methuen in association with theatres as both programme and playscript.

## Art and artisanate

Nicholas Shrimpton

John Ruskin  
Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

bevels smoulder, mountains glisten, buildings shine from casts and drawings. The crucial exhibit, amid all its brilliancy, is a small dark photograph of an over-crowded gallery. In 1875 John Ruskin bought a stone cottage in Bellhag Road, Walkley, Sheffield. There, in an upstairs room, he created an educational museum for the iron-workers of Yorkshire.

The Arts Council's touring exhibition, called simply *John Ruskin*, is both celebration and a recreation of that pioneering endeavour. Britain, Ruskin argued, should have a "National Store" to counterbalance the National Debt. But that store should not be merely a depository. Its purpose was to quicken and inspire, to generate a new and living art. Ruskin's museum was in Sheffield because iron-work was the characteristic enterprise of nineteenth-century England. An aesthete (and moral) education for iron-workers was therefore the quickest way to vivify the nation's culture.

If Ruskin were alive today I think we can be fairly certain that he would be lectured on one pretext or another, in a series of bitter battles with the Arts Council. That said, it still remains the case that the Arts Council is, in however attenuated a form, the real heir of Ruskin's socio-aesthetic purposes. The Guild of St George, Ruskin's own vehicle for such ideas, is alive and well but scarcely in a position to undertake a nation-wide crusade of artistic regeneration. The Arts Council, which is charged with just such a dual purpose of conservation and creation, is paying a timely tribute to the man who made its own existence possible.

The photograph of the Walkley Museum, though not identified quite so precisely as it might be (is this the new gallery added in 1884, or the alternative home in Moorsbrook Park provided by Sheffield Corporation in 1897), takes us to the heart of these didactic ambitions. The artisans of Sheffield were supplied with what seems to be an extraordinary jumble of geological specimens, paintings, maps, books, manuscripts and casts of architectural sculpture. But the blend was not random. This potent aesthetic reward was mixed with great care to generate, simultaneously, a reverence for nature, an acquaintance with good workmanship, and a sense of the moral and spiritual potential of great art. By the middle of this century the logic behind the mixture had been forgotten and the collection was dismantled. Now, after many years of scholarly work, particularly at the University of Reading, the Guild Museum is to move to a new home in its native city.

James Clegg has assembled, for this exhibition, more than seventy items from the collection that showed in that room at Walkley. They give us a powerful flavour of the distinctive character which Sheffield will eventually be able to enjoy. More important even than this, however, is that she has placed around them, a number of exhibits illustrating Ruskin's life and work have been drawn from other sources and are on principles suggested by his own exemplary and didactic practice. Although this exhibition is an education, as well as an aesthetic pleasure, it is a demonstration of the power of Ruskin's conception of the education of the eye.

At the centre of the assemblage is Ruskin's own "A glass case contains the key-blue necktie; a map of the Alps; his geological hammer; his diary; and his pen. Around this are arranged the 'memorable' letters, letters and drawings of his contemporaries, a silk pouch stuffed with a pile of gold, in which he carried a

letter from Rose La Touche, speaks painfully of his disturbed emotional life. A childhood notebook, filled with precocious "sermons", is open at a characteristic meditation on "The Law of Sacrifice."

Radiating out from this is a series of visual essays, roughly chronological in plan, which traces the development of his mind. "The Iris of the Earth", "The Anatomy of the Mountains", "Swiss Life in the Olden Times" - the subdivisions sound like chapters in an intellectual biography, an impression reinforced by the fact that the foreword to the catalogue is by Tim Hilton, who is writing just such a thing. As chapters they manage to be coherent without becoming inflexible. "The Beginnings of Chivalry", for example, turns out to be as much concerned with Ruskin the zoologist as it is with the way in which St George's struggle with the dragon underlies his later political thought.

The general movement is from rocks to mountains (some superbly vigorous Ruskin water-colours here, hung cheek by jowl with Turner's much-loved "Fusion of the Greis and the Tassels Rocks"), from mountains to Swiss pastoral society, and from there to botany, Gothic architecture, Venetian painting and policy, Verona, Tuscany, zoology, more botany, and finally the "storm-cloud" which unites meteorology, mythology and madness. Each category is far more various than such rapid summary can suggest. "Proserpina", for example, though principally concerned with botanical drawing, includes an extraordinary exhibit from the Guild Museum in which "the moral history of England" is illustrated by the sequence of twenty-three coins. The "ghostly" gold crown of Henry VIII, on which the moral hangs, marks a break with medieval design. But it also carries the (botanical) inscription "Pious Sin". For Ruskin these words, as well as reminding him of the church of Santa Maria della Spina at Pisa, spoke of a sensual attitude to beauty which excluded sacrifice and pain. A numismatic display case, in other words, simultaneously epitomizes the argument of nineteenth-century medievalism and sends us back to the water-colours of roses, with our responses morally charged.

Later thinking as eccentric as that will either strike you as an infuriating piece of intellectual irresponsibility, or suggest an exhilarating, quasi-poetic freshness of mind. The densely associative quality of Ruskin's thought has rarely been so vividly demonstrated. By way of incidental reward you will also encounter some remarkably beautiful things. Only the large plaster casts of Gothic sculpture, two of which are illustrated upside down in the otherwise excellent catalogue (89pp, Arts Council, £3.95 at £3.50), are dramatic enough to have an immediate impact on the eye. But the mass of small drawings and water-colours contains at least a dozen pieces which require us to think very seriously about the current under-estimation of Ruskin the painter.

On its opening in Sheffield the exhibition, described by its organizers as a "maze", was perhaps a little too labyrinthine and it would be nice to think that at Liverpool (July 7 to August 7), the Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal (August 13 to September 18) and the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (September 25 to November 13) it could be hung in a manner which reflects the sub-divisions of the catalogue more precisely. Even as a maze, however, it has a clue, worth central importance. Enchanted by the performer's debonair elegance on stage, Felix is thunderstruck on going backstage to discover he is really a squinting mountebank covered in pustules: establishing the book's concern with stylish bravura and effrontery, this also pushes to the fore Mann's usual fascination with polarities. As with the more sombre novels - such as *Doctor Faustus*, some of whose scenes it teasingly burlesques - *Felix Krull* is keenly alert to the interdependence of brilliance and



"Woodcock going to catch a fly" and "Eagle's head", two water-colours by Ruskin from the exhibition reviewed here.

## Confidence betrayed

Peter Kemp

Felix Krull  
Channel 4

*Felix Krull*, on Channel 4, could hardly have been less felicitous. Dismally dubbed, it repeatedly featured dialogue that failed to synchronize with mouths moving on the screen. More jarringly, the entire adaptation failed to synchronize with Thomas Mann's novel. Characters were transformed, incidents invented or inverted. The book's tone - bracingly crisp and dry - thickened into cloying sadness.

Eager to exploit the story's *fin de siècle* setting, the film proffered a skittish sequence of risqué romps, all ooh-la-la and lingerie. For devotees of exotic underwear, in fact, it must have been a treat, with no opportunity missed for the exhibiting of unusual costumes, cami-knickers, curious combinations, gash garters and black stockings. Nor were other tastes neglected. Felix's childhood sex-experiences - inconveniently specific in the book - were elaborated into pre-pubescent bath-scenes with a nubile nanny: lingering absently on his nude stripping, the film seemed closer to *Dennis in Venice* than to *Felix Krull*. An especially favoured third party regularly hovered close to Felix's couplings. As he tumbled on, far with Rozsa the prostitute, an overcoated neighbour juddered in eavesdropping ecstasy outside the door; his bedding of the blue-stocking, Diane Philibert, came under the surveillance of a hotel detective.

Enthusiastically importing the crude, this dramatization omitted the crucial. The scene where Felix is taken to meet the actor, Miller-Rose, for instance - an event which, he says, "will remain for ever in my memory" - was completely overlooked. Yet it is of central importance. Enchanted by the performer's debonair elegance on stage, Felix is thunderstruck on going backstage to discover he is really a squinting mountebank covered in pustules: establishing the book's concern with stylish bravura and effrontery, this also pushes to the fore Mann's usual fascination with polarities. As with the more sombre novels - such as *Doctor Faustus*, some of whose scenes it teasingly burlesques - *Felix Krull* is keenly alert to the interdependence of brilliance and

corruption, the civilized and the raw. Such intense - and mutually intensifying - opposites were beyond the unambitious span of this adaptation. Here, languorous and nameless reigned, characters bearing strongly distinctive features in the book were smoothed down into inanity. Particularly startling was the metamorphosis of Donna Maria Pio, the stately, severe *senhora* Felix meets in Lisbon. Not content with giving her some flaccid facial surgery - replacing her "haughty, compressed lips, flaring nostrils and... creases between her brows" with loose simpering, pouts and winks - the film, in a final piece of travesty, set her cowering in bull-fighter's rig as a torrid, toreador. Likewise, Felix's godfather, Schimmlerprester - whose "whole appearance gave the impression of a sharp and bitter turn of mind" - seemed here to have nothing to feel about, being processed into a bacchanalian *bon vivant*, quaffing champagne amid a bevy of buxom and office-bare Bohemians.

Vapidity also infused the film's settings with an insipidly rosy hue. Where the novel accompanies Felix's suave scaling of the social heights with precise, alluring evocation of life in Paris or Lisbon, this adaptation confined itself to vague and banally "picturesque" backgrounds. Typically, Felix's initiation into the elegance of Paris was replaced by immersion in the vulgarities of Monte Carlo. The book's rapturously sensuous cataloguing of *de luxe* commodities coarsened into gross display.

Characterless in ambience, the film was even more so in its central figure. John Moulder-Brown looked right as the chic crook - combining, as Felix plausibly does, dark skin with blue eyes and blondness - but he never displayed a personality to match. Playful and null - ingenious more than ingenious - he seemed a peculiarly implausible confidence man. Scenes requiring him to put on a performance proved outside his range. To the climactic comic episode where Felix dodges conscription by simulating an epileptic fit - something requiring the unleashing of an unnerving repertoire of mugged-up symptoms - he merely brought tiny twitchings suggestive of a cricked neck. The emptiness of his acting, though, was of a piece with the hollowiness of the entire enterprise. Given his heavy investment in sex-scenes, it would be misleading to say that this film-embalmed *Felix Krull*, but it certainly un-Manned it.

## New Oxford Books: Philosophy

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Peter Achinstein

This book offers a new approach to the definition of scientific explanation. Unlike standard theories, it focuses initially on explaining the act itself, to which reference must be made in order to understand what an explanation is and how it can be evaluated in the sciences. The "locutionary" theory of explanation here developed is brought to bear on many key issues in the philosophy of science. £22.60

Oxford University Press















Since I received much of my graduate training in cultural anthropology in Britain, I should be sorry if this collection represents the current state of the subject there. Nor do I want to believe that it indicates the current positions of all its contributors, for writers such as Parkin, R. H. Barnes, Willis and Gudeman have all written lucidly and astutely elsewhere. Semantic anthropology appears to be in the ascendant, but this is due more to the acuity of their analytical powers than even to a muddling of their English. Some of the problems raised are valid, even central to our discipline; the ways of going about trying to deal with them here seem unlikely to lead anywhere, but to recognize our own failure in the analytical nerve, and to an inhibition in recognizing useful anthropology.

disaffected population there. For the same reason – but after much violence – the Nagas too have their own self-governing territory. Along the same line of thinking are to be placed the several references in the book to tribals in the district of Sirikakulam, who make the administration work for them and not for the exploiters. They can do so because their participation in the Naxalite violence a decade ago has made others fear them and has restored their respect for themselves.

This is a very interesting book, not only much for the ethnography (von Fürer-Haimendorf has written other books on both regions) but for the problem it discusses (of disadvantaged minorities), for the contrast between the two areas, and above all, for the spectacle of the author's forty or more years of industrious ethnography among – and practical concern for – India's tribal peoples.

is that their comparison of "Bengali" and "Tamil" contains little evidence that their own informants were, in fact, responding to the question of these two vast populations. Indeed, the evidence to the contrary is considerable. The second objection has to do with a basic problem in the "cultural" approach. By radical separating cultural meaning from social structure, the relation between the two levels is largely ignored, so that we are told next to nothing about how Bengali and Tamil cultural constructions are related to the social groups that actually exist. In short, if old-fashioned analysis are in fact more useful than they believe, the editors do propose a valuable alternative method for tackling the central difficulty Dumont's analysis of Indian kinship

The book includes five other papers written by Sylvia Tatum on Hindi kin terms and address: V. N. Madan on Kashmiri Brahmins' ideology of the householder; Anthony T. Carter on concepts of the virgin in Maharashtra; R. S. Mathur on concepts of the virgin and mother in north India; and Pauline Kolenda on widowhood in an Uttar Pradesh Harijan community. All of them contain excellent and imaginative interpretations of the data. (It should have been mentioned, though, that Madan's essay appeared in a very similar form in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* in 1981.) None of the five authors, however, follows the editor's approach or all closely; some of them indeed, firmly follow a quite different line. Nor do most of them have much say about concepts of the person as that issue is formulated by the editors.

One possible method of proceeding is to argue that Dumont's mistake was to treat kinship as a discrete domain constituted by genealogically defined relationships. David Schneider has advocated a "cultural" approach to kinship studies; for him, the central task is interpretation of sets of social

But the freedom from dogmatism is one of the book's most attractive features, for which the editors must be given credit. *Concepts of Person* makes an important contribution to the understanding of Indian kinship — both northern and southern.



# From the heroic to the allegorical

Malcolm Godden

J. R. R. TOLKIEN

*The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*  
Edited by Christopher Tolkien  
204pp. Allen and Unwin. £9.95.  
004 8090190

*Finn and Hengest: The Fragment and the Episode*  
Edited by Alan Bliss  
180pp. Allen and Unwin. £9.95.  
004 8290033

*The Old English Exodus*  
Text, Translation and Commentary  
Edited by Joan Turville-Petre  
85pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £7.95.  
019 811770

S. A. J. BRADLEY

*Anglo-Saxon Poetry*  
559pp. Dent. £10.95 (paperback,  
£4.95).  
0460 107941

BRUCE MITCHELL and FRED C. ROBINSON

*A Guide to Old English: Revised with Texts and Glossary*  
271pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £15  
(paperback, £5.95).  
0631 127984

J. R. R. Tolkien's reputation as an Anglo-Saxon scholar is high among those who were taught by him. Others have had little to judge him by, and even those who knew him are still heard grumbling that he spent his twenty years in the Oxford chair of Anglo-Saxon and his fourteen years in the chair of English Language writing fairy-stories. Recent excavations in Tolkien's desk go some way to redeem his reputation. The lectures and prefaces in the new collection edited by his son are mostly familiar pieces, including the "monsters and critics" lecture on *Beowulf*, but there is a new and valuable paper on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and the lectures on the Old English *Exodus* and on the story of Finn and Hengest have not been seen in print before. Two points become clearer about Tolkien as an Anglo-Saxon scholar: his fondness for story-telling as a form of criticism; and his enthusiasm for the Germanic roots of Anglo-Saxon legend and language.

Tolkien used story as a mode of interpretation in the two pieces on Anglo-Saxon poetry published during his lifetime, the essays on *Beowulf* and *Maldon*, but the lectures on Finn and Hengest (very well edited by Alan Bliss) show a more extensive use of story-making. The stories with which he builds his tale are few and jumbled: a fragment of an Anglo-Saxon lay known as "The Fight at Finnsburg" preserved only in an unreliable eighteenth-century transcript, and a cryptic and allusive song recited in

*Beowulf*. They hint at a tragic conflict in Frisia some time in the Heroic Age. Not much can be pieced together for certain, but it appears that a Danish king, Hnaef, was visiting his sister's husband Finn, King of the Frisians, with sixty of his warriors, when he was attacked by Finn's followers. Many were killed on both sides, including Hnaef and Finn's son. A peace of sorts was established but when spring came the Danes took sudden revenge on the Frisians, killing Finn and taking his queen and his treasure back to Denmark. Tolkien takes this story, adds to it the scattered occurrences of the same or similar names in other ancient texts and develops his own account of what really happened in Finnsburg. The crucial figures, in his view, are the Jutes. He places the events around the year 450. The Danes had been steadily pushing into Jutland, displacing the earlier inhabitants, and thus there were Jutish exiles at Finn's court, including Garulf, the heir to the Jutish throne. It was these who initiated the attack on Hnaef and his men, stirred up by their old hostility to the Danes and their personal antagonism to another group of Jutes, led by the adventurer Hengest, who had earlier joined forces with the Danes. As the fighting continued round the hall the Frisians were gradually drawn into the attack, but Finn himself may have played no part and was eventually able to establish a truce between the two sides. The surviving Danes sailed home but Hengest and his Jutes stayed behind in the service of Finn. However, the Danes secretly returned with fresh forces, persuaded Hengest to help them and took bloody revenge on Finn, whom they held responsible for the death of Hnaef their king.

The Danish interest in the story, as well as at this point, but Tolkien goes on again, collected a fresh band of Jutish warriors and, with his brother Horsa, sailed to Britain to serve with the British king Vortigern. Once again he turned on his host-king and killed him, and then carved himself a kingdom in Kent; his success prompted further incursions by Angles and Saxons, which led in turn to the creation of England. The tragic hero of this drama is Finn, caught up in conflicts not of his own making and destroyed by his own generosity. The Machiavel of Hengest, who appears first in the service of the Danes, the supposed enemies of the Jutes, and thereafter switches allegiances rapidly. But it is the place of the story in the history of nations which Tolkien is keenest to establish. The conditions of heroic conflict are created by Danish expansion into Jutish territory and into Frisian spheres of influence. The suggestive moment in the "Finnsburg" lay when a young

warrior called Garulf is urged not to risk "so precious a life" takes on significance in Tolkien's argument because for him Garulf is the last heir of the Jutish dynasty and with his death in the battle against Hnaef the Jutes as a nation come to an end. Hengest's heroic dilemma (as seen by the Beowulf-poet) acquires an extra significance when Tolkien identifies him with the figure of the same name who appears in legends of the Anglo-Saxon invasions.

It is a powerful story, and when first delivered in 1928 it can have lost nothing from its echoes of recent events, with its picture of two great powers anxious to maintain peace but dragged into a larger conflict by resentful exiles from smaller nations pursuing their old vendettas. It is not, admittedly, very plausible. It is difficult to believe in the theory that there were Jutes on both sides of the conflict, or in the role which Tolkien attributes to Finn, standing idly by for five days or more while a battle rages in and around his own hall, between a group of foreigners in his own service and a party of invited guests which includes his own brother-in-law and his young son. The scraps of evidence are forcefully exploited, but they will not really prove, with any degree of conviction, the date or historical context that Tolkien suggests, or his view that the Hengest of the story is the same as the Hengest of the Anglo-Saxon invasions. It is easy to see how the irritations caused by paucity of evidence and the rigorous demands of historical scholarship made the writing of pure fiction a more attractive alternative.

Tolkien on Finn and Hengest is, even so, an exciting detective-story. Tolkien on *Exodus* is a disappointment. His lecture-notes were clearly designed for a very specialized audience and are mainly concerned with establishing a corrected text, a problem now largely overtaken by subsequent editions. The poem does not seem to have excited Tolkien. What was needed was a wide-ranging exploration in exegetical and apocryphal sources, to explore the curious images and allusions in the Anglo-Saxon poet's account of the Israelites' escape from Egypt, but Tolkien attempted very little in this line. Some passing remarks in his essay on *Sir Gawain* suggest that he may have thought such investigation of purely religious ideas rather blasphemous. Whatever the reason in his case, he was in tune with his time. The nineteenth-century search for Germanic paganism, but in Anglo-Saxon poetry may have petered out, but it was still the heroic poetry, and the heroic touches in other poems, that counted for Tolkien's generation.

That particular age has passed. The last two decades have produced the

techniques and expertise for analysing Anglo-Saxon religious poetry in a thorough manner as Tolkien used for Finn and Hengest, and these have now been turned with a vengeance on the heroic poetry too, to find St Paul, St Augustine and Alcuin buried deep. The difference between Tolkien and the new school is in part an assumption about the Anglo-Saxon audience for poetry. Tolkien took it for granted that the original audience for *Beowulf* and the "Finnsburg" lay knew the full story of the feud and the whole history of the Danes, Jutes, Oeats and Swedes, all handed down in oral tradition and heroic song. The new school posits a highly educated set of listeners or readers familiar with the writings of Augustine and Boethius, at least of second hand, and trained to recognize religious allegory at the slightest hint. This in turn involves a revolution in chronology: the old assumption that most of the poetry was early (seventh to ninth century) and in the case of heroic poems drawing on still earlier legends, is necessarily challenged by the new school, since Boethius was probably unknown in England until the end of the ninth century and the training in Augustinian thought by way of vernacular preaching that is posited is unlikely to have been available until the tenth century. The current enthusiasm is a tenth-century date for *Beowulf*, two or three centuries later than the traditional date.

The reversal is perfectly illustrated by the new Everyman anthology of Anglo-Saxon poetry in translation, replacing the old collection by R. K. Gordon which had served for fifty years. The new collection, by S. A. J. Bradley, is a larger one, with more poems, extensive introductions and brief accounts of any poems from the four main codices that are not included, all organized in accordance with manuscript sources rather than genre or date. But the real difference from Gordon is the emphasis on the religious poetry and perspectives, with the imposition of a thoroughgoing Augustinianism on the bulk of the poetry. Gordon began his anthology with *Beowulf* and the other heroic poems, moved on to the elegies, love poems and charms, then gave a selection from the religious poetry and ended with the late historical poems *Brunaburgh* and *Maldon*. Bradley reverses the order, giving 300 pages of biblical and hagiographical verse before such as an allegory appears, and leaving *Beowulf* and the other heroic poems till clearly last. The splendid account of Abraham's battle with the four kings, by far the most inspired part of the early poem on *Genesis* and rightly selected by Gordon to represent that poem, is the part of the poem which is omitted in this collection. In the introductory comments the hand of St Augustine and patristic doctrine lies heavy. Even *Widsith*, that poetic catalogue of the

heroes and tribes of the legendary Germanic world, is given to an Augustinian frame of reference, and the editor confesses an urge to offer religious allegory as the key to that strange love-elegy *The Wife's Lament* (mercifully, he resists the urge). The uninitiated reader, perplexed by the new school of interpretation and looking for some context with reality, will find little help here. The short but delicately allusive poem *Deor* is given the brief account of Weland and Nithhad, Beowulf's seducer, which Gordon had given it, if there is to be any literal understanding at all, that is offered here in a lengthy parallel with Boethius's arguments about Fate and God. For *The Seafarer* St Paul and St Augustine are provided as keys to the allegory but not the traditional reference to Dorothy Whitelock's parallel with actual Irish ascetics setting out in real boats. The translations themselves are careful and painstakingly accurate, if rather stilted and old-fashioned; Anglo-Saxon warriors still appear with breast and bosoms ("It is an excellent virtue a man that he should bind fast his bosom" says the wanderer).

Faced with these shifting sands, the interested beginner would do well to turn to the new versions of Bruce Mitchell's *Guide to Old English*. The *Guide* has been available since 1962 and remains the best available introduction to the language, especially for anyone trying to learn it on his own. It does assume a prior knowledge of grammatical terminology such as accusative and subjunctive, but greatly explains much else that other grammars take for granted, and is particularly helpful on syntax. The new version has texts and glossary added to make it serve as an introductory reader as well as grammar. The choice of texts could not have been bettered as an introduction to Anglo-Saxon literature and culture: Aelfric on the occupations of peasants, artisans and merchants and on ways of interpreting the Bible; the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle on the heroic conflict of Cyneheard and Cyneheard and the Battle of Maldon; Bede on the conversion of the English; and the poet Caedmon; and King Alfred on education and literacy and on the Gothic invasion of Italy, in matching prose and verse versions. The brief passages of verse by Caedmon and Alfred take the reader to the point of confronting Old English poetry, and the prose texts provide at least a degree of help to resisting some of the more extreme criticisms that will be found. In meeting the needs of the beginner Mitchell and Robinson have it side nothing to the handier *Anglo-Saxon* by Goll and Goll, which has no inhibitions about removing linguistic oddities but they faithfully reproduce the content of the texts, and the explanatory comments are sane and helpful.

## BIOGRAPHY AND MEMOIRS

# The Games are the thing

Christopher Booker

LORO KILLANIN

*My Olympic Years*  
218pp. Secker and Warburg. £9.95.  
0436 23401

Not the least of the many ironies surrounding the boycott-battered Moscow Olympic Games of 1980 was the background of the central figure in the drama, the President of the International Olympic Committee whose eight-year term of office culminated in the saving of those Games from complete disaster. Even the most jaundiced of Marxist analysts might have been baffled to account for the "contradiction" that the most daunting opponent of President Carter and Mrs Thatcher in their attempts to scupper the Games was a white-haired Old Etonian hereditary peer, with a wartime record of service in a British armoured brigade. But then of course Lord Killanin was an Irishman, and this would not have been the first time that the smallness of Irish life defied Marxist analysis.

Lord Killanin has produced a workmanlike rather than inspired account of his years of guiding the Olympic movement through the most fraught period of its history. He became vice-president in 1968, just after the Mexican government had celebrated its staging of the Olympic

Games by shooting down 250 students. He succeeded Avery Brundage as president in the immediate aftermath of the "Munich Massacre", and inherited the growing nightmare of preparing for the 1976 Games in Montreal (perhaps inevitably his chapter on this is headed "Oh God Oh Montreal"). Even the chaos and walkouts of 1976 were eventually to pale, however, beside those besetting the 1980 Games after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and inevitably the growing threat to the Olympic movement of the world's political squabbles casts its shadow over a great deal of this book.

Despite so obviously despising politicians (or perhaps one should say American, British and South African politicians in particular, and President Carter above all), Lord Killanin writes much like any politician compiling his memoirs after a life of committee meetings and flights between one set of airport-lounges and international hotels and another. It cannot be said that his story contains many astonishing revelations or profound reflections on the relations between sport and politics. He also affects to despise bureaucracy, but so much of his narrative is taken up with the bureaucratic arrangements of the Olympic movement that he has to preface his book with a three-page guide to the acronyms of the countless sporting bodies which litter his pages—AANOC, AIPS, CNSOF, CONI, COJO (see COGO), ODEPA (see

PASO) — and he begins his acknowledgements with the memorable sentence "This volume was made possible by my former colleagues on the IOC and the IFs, NOCs and COCOs". As someone who was in Moscow in 1980, I inevitably looked forward above all to his account of what it was like to be right at the centre of that extraordinary, eerie spectacle. It has to be said that Lord Killanin does not tell us very much. Despite casting much contempt on President Carter's undoubted naivety over the boycott campaign, Killanin himself shows an almost hilarious naivety towards the realities of Soviet life. There was one extraordinary meeting in the Kremlin two months before the Games opened when he asked Mr Brezhnev "if he could do something regarding the

Afghanistan position to avoid the political destruction of the Games". Mr Brezhnev gave me a promise to do his very best so that the atmosphere might improve.

Lord Killanin seems to think that the showpiece Kalinin Prospect is spelled "Kallinin" (presumably by some engrammatical confusion with his own name) and that its "glass-fronted shops with their 'ever increasing number of consumer goods' could be 'anywhere in the world' (which only shows that he cannot have gone into there). There are many such giveaway touches and he seems much more convinced that his hotel rooms and conversations were "bugged" in the United States than in the Soviet Union.

It is all very well to be idealistic about the need to keep sport and the

Olympic Games free from political entanglement, and to acclaim the Soviet Union's "mess sports participation philosophy" as being "designed in the way de Coubertin had hoped the Olympic revival would lead the world", but unfortunately idealism requires unblinkered realism if it is to be anything more than wishful thinking. The fact is that the most successful sporting organization in the world, in terms of medals won at the last three Olympic Games, has been the Soviet "All-Union" sports club known as Dynamo. The sponsors of Dynamo, the richest such organization in the USSR, are the KGB, who also sponsor the Gulek Archipelago. "Alas, the real world is rather more complicated than simple Irish idealists would sometimes have us believe."

# Needing to imagine

Anne Chisholm

JANET FRAME

*To the Is-Land: An Autobiography*  
253pp. Women's Press. £6.95.  
07043 39048

With *To the Is-Land*, the New Zealand novelist Janet Frame has taken a considerable risk. She has deliberately uncovered the roots of her private mythology and language, from which her ten novels (among them *Faces in the Water*, *Scented Gardens for the Blind* and *Living in the Maniototo*) and her collections of stories and poems have grown. Born in Dunedin in 1924, she spent most of her childhood and adolescence in Oamaru, a small town by the sea in Otago, on the South Island. She was one of five children. Her father worked for the railways, and in some ways hers was a deprived childhood; the family was poor and she grew up knowing the terrors of debt and illness. Her mother was epileptic. Janet was often ashamed of her body, thin, smelly and wretchedly dressed. But the family circle was full of strong characters and strong emotions, and both parents felt a deep respect for education. Her mother loved poetry; her grandmother sang her the poignant, unforgettable songs of the American South. Her father, although most of his "books" were illustrated papers and magazines, invested in the collected works of Oscar Wilde. Janet Frame's craving to learn was respected and it was hoped that she would grow up to be a teacher.

Reminiscences such as this of the early years of a sensitive child and future writer have a familiar rhythm, as Frame is certainly aware. Her childhood landmarks were more dramatic than most but what is striking about this description of childhood is the way in which Janet Frame's emerging identity fed itself on the scraps and tags of fairy tales and verse. She manages to invoke past innocence, and show how stories, legends and poetic images were for her the magic keys to understanding and expression.

There is little sense of time or place in this account of a New Zealand upbringing, apart from a scattering of place names and mysterious Maori words, a mention of a beach picnic at Christmas and the Damara Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute (the Public Library). She was aware of the effects of the Depression and in due course she had a vaguely pro-Nazi teacher who spoke of the Yellow Peril

and advocated "purity of race"; but her family life was so intense and her passion for words so strong that it was the formation of her internal world, not the discovery of the world outside that mattered. Of course the words themselves and all her cultural references and standards were English. "None of our English studies even supposed that such a thing as a New Zealand writer or New Zealand existed."

Later, Frame's complex, intense novels drew deeply from the well of childhood memories. Her first friend, Poppy, who lent her Grimm's Fairy Tales; echoes from the tales themselves; the Scholar Gypsy, with whom, as a schoolgirl, she thought herself in love; a tawny velvet dress she had when she was four; all of these reappear in *Scented Gardens for the Blind* or *Living in the Maniototo*. Most strikingly, her sister Myrtle's recitation of "I Met a Little Prince of Sleep" recurs again and again. Myrtle was drowned in the public swimming pool; the phrase takes on a sinister ring. In her fiction, Frame has been determined to transcend realism, explore the subconscious, enter the confused minds and uncover the connection between the writer's life and the work. This autobiography provides many clues to the working of her mind and talent, for despite a certain overwroughtness she is a writer of originality and power. Towards the end of this book she names her central quest: "My life had been for many years in the power of words. It was driven now by a constant search and need for what was, after all, only a word — imagination."

# Forms of politeness

Judith Landry

LUIGI MAGNANI

*Il mio Morandi: Un saggio e cinquantotto lettere*  
127pp. Turin: Einaudi. L. 20,000.  
88 06 05423 6

This oddly titled volume seems to have given its subject the status of an institution: it consists of an essay on Morandi by his friend Luigi Magnani, followed by reproductions of twelve paintings and fifty-eight letters from Morandi to Magnani. The frontispiece is a photograph of the two men in the formal, slightly uneasy, proximity which seems to have characterized their relationship; the essay is a hagiography in tone while the letters are a wonderland for deconstructionists on commission.

Morandi is known to have been a courteous, unassuming, even slightly shy man who lived a sedulously uneventful existence (talk of prizes, for instance, made him "nervous"). Magnani writes of him with obvious affection and respect. Sometimes with too much respect when he describes Morandi as "a painter in a special sense, an existing notes but to have animated them to the original timbre of another

instrument, thus giving them completely new reverberations and emotions". The anecdotes, though quiet, are sometimes revealing, often about their narrator. At the beginning of their acquaintance, Magnani presented Morandi with some valuable old musical instruments and asked for a painting of them; Morandi politely demurred, objecting that they might get broken, which Magnani thought unlikely unless the laws of gravity were to invert themselves; but the true reason, of course, was that "the objects chosen by him as pretexts for his compositions suggested themselves to his gaze not isolated in their particularity, but in relation to his whole inner world, from which they received their intensely alive quality". In short, these "artistic, chimney-like bottles were, first and foremost, bottles of the mind; Morandi purchased some cheap musical equivalents from a market stall and kindly painted his first and last paintings on commission.

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carefully storing away bits of left-over polenta in matchboxes, he engenders a peculiar sense of iconoclasm in the reader.

The letters consist purely of greetings, acknowledgments, pious wishes, dry commonplace remarks over failed meetings. Like a figure in an Italian primer, Morandi addresses Magnani in the polite form throughout the twenty years they cover. While conceding that the letters do not contain a word about the paintings (though there is mention of frames) Magnani somewhat wildly describes Morandi's epistolary style as "receding words from the wear and tear of other people's use, 'the sincere simple language of an open heart'". The most one can honestly say of them is that Morandi seems to have been a very polite Italian. The quality of his paintings is never in doubt, but words were not his language.

*The Wagners of Brighton* by Sir Anthony Wagner and Antony Dale (180pp. Phillimore Press, Shipbourne Hall, Chichester, Sussex. £9.95. 0 85033 445 4). Traces the history of the Wagner family from 1708, when Heinrich Wagner arrived in England from Silesia, and soon after was adopted better to George I. His descendants remained royal hangers-on for three generations: two generations married French Protestant wives,

# From the partial to the total

Catherine La Farge

SANDRA NESS IHLE

*Malory's Grail Quest: Invention and Adaptation in Medieval Prose*

198pp. Princeton: Princeton University Press. \$25.00.

Studies of Malory's *Quest* have been complicated not only by the temptation to read text and source simultaneously (a habit C. S. Lewis called cutting the raw ingredients of the pudding along with the pudding itself), but also by the modern distaste for errors. Many critics still see the source, the thirteenth-century *Queste del Saint Graal*, as E. K. Chambers did: "mythic adventures and still more symbolic visions, with a hermit waiting at every road-side to expound the symbolism in the bitterest detail". Malory has often been praised simply for removing some of the hermits.

Sandra Ness Ihle's approach allows for the two texts' separate concerns and techniques. Borrowing terms from

Paul Frank's architectural studies, she compares the *Queste* to a Gothic structure which creates an effect of "partiality" and mystery. She draws an analogy between Gothic principles of "spatial division", the "smooth flow of forces", and "diagonality" and the way in which Malory's *Queste* divides its narrative into "partial" and "total" sections. Malory's *Queste*, if then compared to a Gothic cathedral, which Frank himself provokes a sense of "totality", complicates the "knowability" of the structure. This is the "totality" of Malory's "partiality", the "totality" of the "partiality" of Malory's "totality".

Ms Ihle associates these contrasting methods of composition with thematic differences. The *Queste* seeks, for instance, to suggest the ultimate ineffability of the meaning of the Grail; it is "defined periphrastically" (this is its mystery) to identify its essence, to ignore the diversity of its manifestation, and the interpenetration of images attached to it. Malory, by contrast, places the Grail within reach: he prunes back its meanings, stressing its identification with the Eucharist — an institution-

alized entity accessible not to Calahad alone, but also to a "synful man of the world" like Lancelot. The gradual, incomplete unfolding of allegorical significance in the *Queste* gives way to Malory's more direct assignment of meaning and his emphasis on social values.

Malory's *Queste* drew its authority from Gothic architecture and architecture, he claimed for these phenomena a "palpable and purely factual domain of time and place", more than a "mere parallelism" but less specific than "individual influences". The hard facts which he brought to bear may seem insufficient to the sceptical, but at least they offer some contemporary support to a stimulating thesis. This is careful to point that while the *Queste* appeared during the age of the Gothic cathedrals, Malory and the construction of Romanesque buildings are several centuries out of step. But it is a pity that the structures themselves, without any substantial defence of analysing the literary in terms of the visual. Such a defence is needed, for Ihle's comparisons are too lengthy and too often repeated to be taken as incidental metaphors.

There are further problems: is Romanesque, in some abstract

point, without resort to concepts of influence, *Zeitgeist* or *mentalité*, or indeed any rigorous theoretical basis, she simply proposes that one "can illuminate the structural aspects of one work of art by means of another".

One might argue that the products of one age resemble those of another because of similarities — social, intellectual or aesthetic — between the two eras. But this is not what Ihle has in mind. References to literary works (let alone other matters) aside from the *Sankgreal* and the *Queste*, are extremely rare; Matthew of Vendôme and Geoffrey of Villehardouin make brief appearances in the text, and Hugh of St Victor and Dante turn up in short footnotes. But these and the naming of rhetorical devices do not suffice to clarify central similarities and differences of tradition. Appeal is made simply to the structures themselves, without any substantial defence of analysing the literary in terms of the visual. Such a defence is needed, for Ihle's comparisons are too lengthy and too often repeated to be taken as incidental metaphors.

There are further problems: is Romanesque, in some abstract

sense, the architecture of "totality"? Two eminent twentieth-century art historians, trained in German universities, forced to leave by the Nazis, and subsequently appointed to positions at Princeton do not agree. Panofsky associates Romanesque with "impenetrability", Gothic with clarity and "totality"; Frenkiel (and Ihle) associate Romanesque with "totality" and "graspability", Gothic with mystery and "partiality".

Finally, attention to Malory's style and level would produce a different description from one based exclusively upon broader outlines of structure and theme; that he concentrates on earthly values, Lancelot and brotherhood is scarcely new. Nevertheless, Ihle has given a detailed account of relevant divergences from the source, and confirms the reader's sense of those preoccupations as inextricable from narrative form.

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